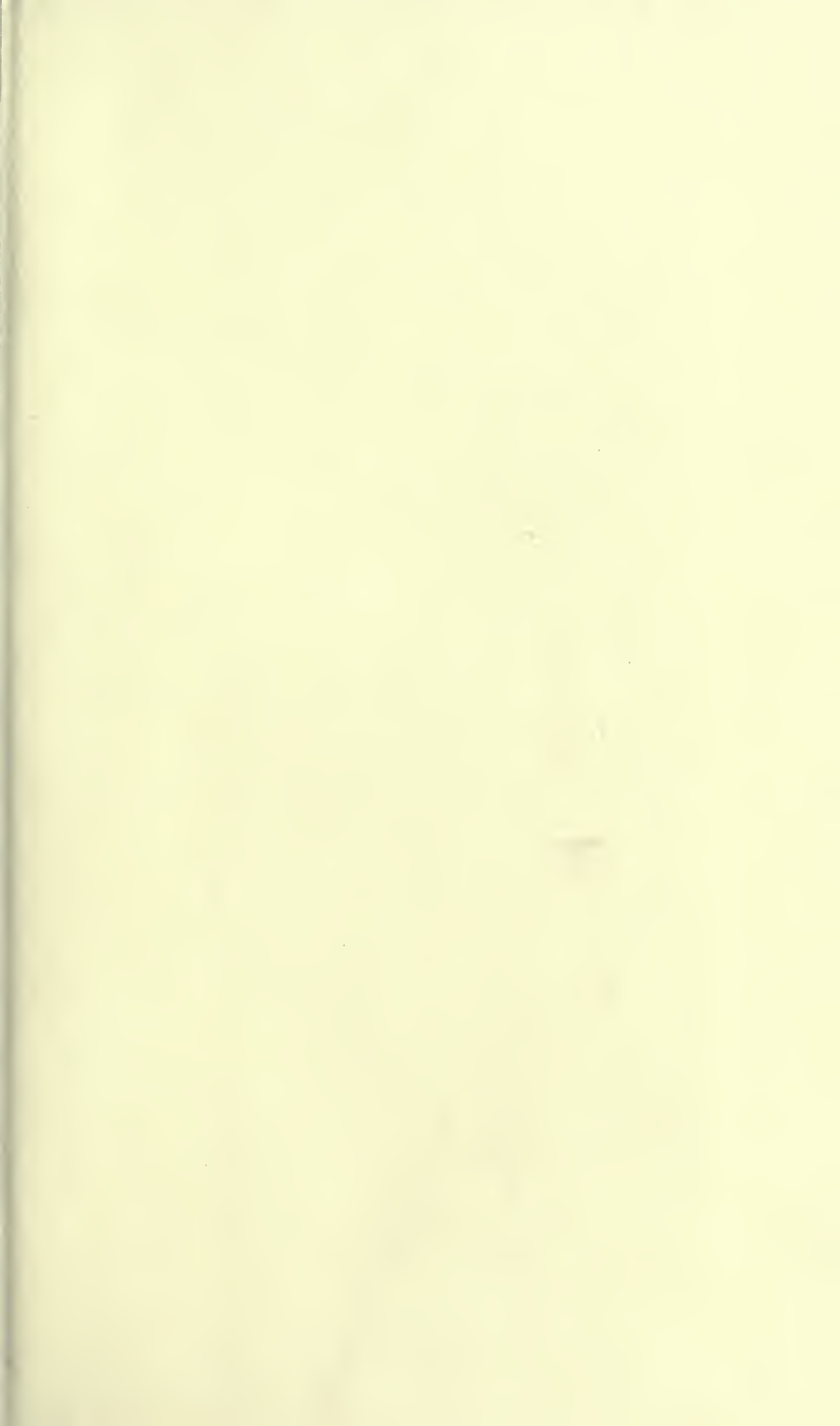


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ART. VII.—HAMILTON'S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE.

By Prof. HENRY B. SMITH.

Reid's Collected Writings. Preface, Notes, and Supplementary Dissertations. By Sir WILLIAM HAMILTON, Bart., Professor of Logic and Metaphysics in the University of Edinburgh. 3d ed. 1852.

Discussions in Philosophy, Literature, etc. By Sir WILLIAM HAMILTON. New-York. 1853.

Lectures on Metaphysics and Logic. By Sir WILLIAM HAMILTON. Edited by Rev. H. L. MANSEL, and JOHN VEITCH. In Two Volumes. Vol. I. *Metaphysics.* 1859. Vol. II. *Logic.* 1860. Pp. 738, 751. Boston: Gould & Lincoln.

IN the excellent and convenient Boston edition of the Lectures of Sir William Hamilton, we have the philosophical legacy of the ablest representative of the Scottish school of philosophy, and of one of the most illustrious thinkers of the nineteenth century. Incomplete as he has left many of his works, they yet give abundant evidence of that logical acuteness, firm grasp of thought, and historical learning on recon-dite themes, which have made his name famous. His new Analytic is not fully developed; but his Lectures on Logic are the most complete treatise on that subject in English literature. His Philosophy of the Conditioned is not systematically unfolded; but its principles are laid down in a distinct and definite manner, and in sharp contrast with the German speculations. His Notes to Reid's Collected Writings are a store-house of acute criticism, and multifarious and precise learning, and have made Reid's works to have a double value; few authors find such an editor. His articles in the *Edinburgh Review* on metaphysical subjects, accomplished a work to which hardly a parallel can be found in periodical literature. They made all

England conscious of the philosophical relation of the Scotch to the continental schools. When others were dumb with amazement or trepidation in view of the transcendental schemes of Teutonic speculation, this intrepid and acute thinker presented himself within the lists, and threw down the gauntlet against all comers—to vindicate, on philosophical grounds, the philosophy of common sense in face of the proud pretensions of the philosophy of the absolute. His name and fame, in the annals of philosophy, are identified with this work. Besides this, as a teacher of philosophy in the University of Edinburgh, he revived the study of logic and metaphysics at a time when logic was neglected and metaphysics every where spoken against; and he created an enthusiastic school, which has able advocates in England and America, as well as in Scotland. His system has now become a part of the history of philosophy; and it deserves to be studied, not only because he was one of the most vigorous of thinkers, but because his speculations bear upon the relation between the Scotch and the German schools, and enter into the very heart of the controversy between philosophy and faith.

The events of Sir William Hamilton's outward life were few and simple; nor are his published works voluminous in comparison with those of most of the great thinkers. He was born in Glasgow, March 8, 1788, a descendant of a noble family. In the university of Glasgow, he stood first in philosophy. Becoming a student in Oxford (Baliol College), he there attained an unrivalled knowledge of the ancient systems. As a candidate for honors in 1812, he professed himself ready to be examined upon all the extant works of Greek and Roman philosophy—Plato, Aristotle, the New-Platonists, etc. With the chief scholastic systems, and the works of Descartes and Leibnitz, he was already familiar. He began the practice of law; but general learning was his chosen field. His first contribution to philosophy was a series of papers against the phrenological hypotheses of Combe, read before the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1826, the fruit of a minute investigation of craniological facts. In 1829 appeared his first elaborate metaphysical article, against Cousin and all the Germans, pro-

nouncing the philosophy of the Absolute to be an hallucination ; and laying down his fundamental position, that our ideas of the Infinite and Absolute are negative, the product of an imbecility of the mind. In 1830, in the *Edinburgh Review*, he published an essay on the Philosophy of Perception, reducing Reid's doctrine to a more definite statement, and severely criticising the philosophy of Brown. In 1833 he wrote his article on Logic, exposing the inaccuracies of Whately, and other writers, and showing a marvellous acquaintance with the literature of the subject. In these three articles, the fundamental positions of his philosophy are already stated. His system was matured ; and he was prepared to enter upon the post of Professor of Logic and Metaphysics in the University of Edinburgh, to which he was chosen, not without a hard struggle, in 1836. Sixteen years before he had been an unsuccessful candidate for the professorship of Moral Philosophy, to succeed Dr. Brown — John Wilson being elected in his stead. He addressed himself with ardor to his new office, and in two years wrote out his courses on Metaphysics and Logic, in substance as now published. This great task could only have been performed on the basis of such a preparation as he had made in almost all departments of learning. He infused a new spirit into the lecture-room, and trained his students to independent thought : “ *On earth there is nothing great but man ; in man there is nothing great but mind* ” — was the motto, which each one saw on entering his class. He was now in the fulness of his mental vigor ; and began at once an edition of Reid's works, first published in 1846, and not yet completed, breaking off in the midst of a note. The Supplementary Dissertations gave a new phase to the philosophy of common sense, and illustrated it with prodigal learning.

In these Dissertations, and in the articles already referred to in the *Edinburgh Review*, we find the height of his speculative development ; what is added in the notes to his Lectures is chiefly in the way of explanation and defence. His metaphysical system, as such, was never fully carried out. The most of an attempt in this direction, is perhaps found in the Appendix to his Discussions on the “ Conditions of the Thinkable

Systematized ; an Alphabet of Human Thought." His general theory of knowledge is there applied to the principle of Causality, as it had been to the Infinite and Absolute. The same work contains all his other chief papers—on Collier's Idealism ; on the Study of Mathematics, rating it below logic as a mental discipline ; a series of articles on Education, in which the abuses of the English system are unsparingly exposed ; a thorough discussion of the authorship of the *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum*, etc. But with all his vast learning, dialectic skill, and critical sagacity, he has left us only fragments of the system which he intended to rear. Parts of the edifice are complete ; the whole is incomplete ; and the architect is no more. It may be, that on his principles, the task was superhuman. On moral philosophy, we find only a few scattered hints ; æsthetics, as a science, he never seems to have studied ; of metaphysics, as distinct from psychology, he does not give any clear conception ; to the philosophy of history, there is scarcely an allusion in all his works ; on the relation between philosophy and faith, a topic to which all his speculations seemed inevitably to lead him, there are only the most general and indefinite statements. Where he speaks of theological points with confidence, it is usually apparent, that he had not made them matters of thorough study. Nothing can be more incorrect, e. g., than his strong statements about the Assurance of Faith, as being the essence of the Protestant doctrine ; * and on the relation of freedom and decrees, he does not get beyond the commonplaces of popular instruction. And, in fact, on the general principles of Hamilton's system, as we may see in the course of the discussion, it is well nigh impossible to construct a *science*, either of ethics, or of theology ; for absolute right and absolute being are to him simply inconceivable ; and all that can remain in either department is a body of practical and regulative truths, but not a science, ✓

* See the *British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, October, 1856, for a thorough refutation of Sir William's misconceptions and misstatements on this point. He even went so far as to say, that the doctrine of assurance being abandoned, there remained only a verbal dispute about justification between Roman Catholics and Protestants.

based on an idea. With all of Hamilton's immense learning, too, there are parts of the history of philosophy itself, with which he does not show any thorough acquaintance. He studied Aristotle minutely; but Plato he seldom cites, partly, perhaps, because he felt no sympathy with the spirit of his system. For the same reason, it may be, Coleridge is almost studiously ignored, though Coleridge was exerting in England an influence almost as great as that of Hamilton in Scotland; they represented respectively the two poles of speculative thought. Even Comte and the positivists are hardly ever named by the Scotch logician. In German philosophy, he had studied Kant, and received from him an ineffaceable impression; but the other great German philosophers, he most certainly had not studied. His statement of Schelling's system is exaggerated and incomplete, even in relation to Schelling's youthful speculations; and that Schelling had a different system in his maturer years, seems to have escaped Hamilton's notice. His references to Hegel's scheme are also very vague and unsatisfactory, and not such as to indicate any thorough acquaintance with his whole system.* The works

* In his *Discussions*, p. 31, Note, Hamilton says, that Hegel's whole philosophy is founded "on a violation of logic," for "inpositing pure or absolute existence on a mental datum, immediate, intuitive and above proof (though in truth this be palpably a mere relation, gained by a process of abstraction), he not only mistakes the fact, but violates the logical law, which prohibits us to assume the principle which it behoves us to prove." Are we, then, got to prove logically the very first principle in philosophy—the fundamental point? If so, how can we ever start? What can we start from? Further, how is the principle of "pure, absolute existence, a mere relation"? Is it not, in its very nature, above all relations? And, besides, how is this to be reconciled with what Hamilton himself says about "Existence" in his *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p. 548: "Philosophers who allow a native principle to the mind at all, allow that Existence is such a principle. I shall therefore *take for granted* Existence as the highest category or condition of thought. . . . No thought is possible except under this category. . . . All thought implies the thought of Existence. . . . Let Existence then be laid down as a necessary form of thought." He here explicitly "assumes" the very thing, which, as found in Hegel, he declares to be "a violation of logic." His statements are almost identical with those of the German philosopher on this very point. But, of course, it makes all the difference in the world, whether such a principle be assumed by a Scotchman or a German. It is "necessary" to the former, but "a violation of logic" in the latter. It is common sense in the one, and the pride of reason in the other.

of those Germans who have most vigorously opposed the pantheistic speculations, he seldom cites; in fact, he uniformly speaks of the philosophy of the Infinite and Absolute, as if no German, or any body else, could attach any other than a pantheistic sense to these cardinal terms; they mean with him either pantheism or nothing. But yet, his learning in other directions, and, on special subjects, was beyond any of his English contemporaries, and, in some departments, it probably exhausted all the main sources. And his critical power, his logical subtlety, his skill in definition, his comparison and classification of differing theories, are always admirable, and have been seldom, if ever, surpassed. ✓

In these general aspects, and in these high intellectual qualities, the reputation of Hamilton is ensured. He has taken his place in the illustrious line of those great men, who have given their days and nights to the search after wisdom. He is identified with the progress of logical and metaphysical science. His personal position and reputation among the lovers of wisdom is elevated and unquestionable. But the chief interest that attaches to him, or to any great thinker, is not personal or local. It is in respect to his position upon the fundamental problems of human speculation; it is upon the inquiry, what has he done for the solution of the highest questions about human knowledge and destiny. Where is he to be here ranged? Has he told us any thing new, and any thing better than his predecessors, upon the relation of thought to being, upon the relation of philosophy to faith? Have fundamental truths been made more clear, have the final questions been more sharply put and better answered, in his system than in those which have preceded him? 2

And here, too, in relation to some parts of the system of philosophy, his merits are of the highest order. In the science of logic he was unrivalled. He purified it of much adventitious matter, and viewed it exclusively as the science of the laws of thought as thought, that is, as a purely formal science. He also, under this aspect, made additions to it, which, we think, are theoretically correct, even though practically they may not be found of great utility; particularly in respect to the thorough

quantification of the predicate in both affirmative and negative propositions.* And though behind his whole conception of logic, as a formal science, there still lies the inquiry as to the relation of logical laws to real truth and being (which he nowhere formally discusses); and though, as we shall see, he applies these mere logical laws to the solution of metaphysical questions in a way hardly consistent with his own principles; yet still the science, of which Kant† declared, that since Aristotle it had not gone backward and could not go forward, has been enlarged and purified by the sharp researches and discrimination of the Scotch logician. On the question of Perception, too, in reference to skepticism and idealism, and in its relations to the qualities of external bodies, he has made additions to philosophy—stating all the theories more explicitly and comprehensively than had before been done. And, whatever doubts may rest upon the details of his own theory,‡ his vindication of an immediate knowledge of the external world, and his modification of the doctrine of consciousness to meet this fact, and his exposure of the different schemes of hypothetical and representative perception, are learned, thorough and valuable additions to philosophical science. Had he but applied the same general theory of knowledge to the “intelligible” or supersensible world, that he did to the material and sensible, he would have been kept from some of the most serious difficulties and objections to which his metaphysical system is now exposed.

It is of this, his metaphysical system, that we propose more particularly to speak. The relation of thought to being is the ultimate problem of metaphysical speculation. What are the ultimate and necessary truths of human reason? and, is there a reality corresponding to them? These are the two chief questions of metaphysics, as distinguished from psychology, which investigates the mind and its powers; and from all empirical science, which studies and classifies external phenomena.

* See his conclusive reply to objections in the Appendix to his Lectures on Logic, pp. 539–546.

† *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Vorrede, p. viii.

‡ Compare an able article in the *Princeton Review*, April, 1860.

And the vital point with any system of philosophy is upon these fundamental inquiries.

Hamilton, now, on these points professed to stand, generally, on the basis of the Scotch philosophy—admitting certain ultimate principles of belief, and contending for the veracity of immediate consciousness in its affirmation of their objective, as well as subjective, validity. He illustrated these positions with profound learning; defined the doctrine of common sense; showed that it was legitimate, and how it was to be applied; and set forth the criteria by which its principles are to be tested. (See the Dissertations appended to Reid's Works.) So far, so good. But was this the whole of his system? Did he simply repeat and purify Reid and Stewart? Did he even accept these principles as they did? Their ultimate philosophy was in them. Was Hamilton's likewise? Many seem to think so; although somewhat startled occasionally by what he says about "the imbecility of the mind" as a source of many of its ultimate truths; about the Infinite as a purely negative notion; about Time and Space as subjective conditions of thought; and especially about causality (a pet test of the Scotch ultimate in philosophy) and substance, as expressing the powerlessness of the mind to think rather than any positive thoughts. But the fact is, that, underlying all of Hamilton's statements as to the principles of common sense, there is a theory of knowledge, entirely different from any previously recognized in the Scotch school, and derived chiefly from the system of Kant, of which he was a thorough student. This theory came out in connection with Hamilton's criticisms of the philosophy of Cousin and the Germans. In order to refute the pretensions of the transcendental philosophers he took positions, which, we believe, really undermine the main principles of the Scotch systems, as rational and ultimate. In attempting to rebut the philosophy of the Unconditioned, he left the philosophy of the Conditioned without any basis in man's rational nature.

Instead of the philosophy of common sense, which bids us rest with an unquestioning assurance upon the fundamental laws of belief, he has given us a system which reduces all thought to contradictory propositions, both of which are ut-

terly inconceivable, yet one of which, he says, we must accept; which resolves the infinite and the absolute into mere negations; which declares that philosophy "is at best the reflection of a reality we cannot know," and that "the last and highest consecration of all true religion must be an altar—*To the unknown and unknowable God.*" With the philosophy of the absolute, in his interpretation of it, he declares that he so far agrees, as "to make the knowledge of *nothing* the principle and result of all true philosophy:

"Scire Nihil—studium quo nos laetamur utrique."

He makes philosophy to be ultimately a "philosophical nescience," and exalts the "imbecility" and "impotence" of the mind into a "great principle," by which some of its most important phenomena are to be explained, and which, he says, has been "strangely overlooked." This is the grand discovery of his system; herein he is original. And yet, he was not himself a nihilist; he was, on the contrary, a firm believer in an infinite and absolute God, and, so far as can be judged from incidental allusions, in the cardinal doctrines of the Christian system. He even insisted upon the impotence of thought, that he might exalt the necessity of faith—and faith, too, not merely in a religious, but in a psychological, point of view. In the hopeless contradictions into which reason is plunged by an inexorable logic, he also descried a logical necessity for deciding in favor of one of the alternatives; and this decision he apparently construes as an act of belief, sure indeed, but inscrutable. And thus he endeavored to save his system from the sceptical consequences which a mere rationalist would have deduced from it. If he taught that philosophy ended in ignorance, it was in order to enforce the lesson, that blind belief is the beginning, if not the end, of human wisdom. It is a delicate and difficult matter to annul reason as to the objects of faith without undermining faith. And the main question respecting Hamilton's system is, whether the method and arguments by which he reduced reason to utter contradiction do not also prevent the possibility of a rational faith? In undermining the rationalists, has he not also undermined the be-

liever? Over the grave of reason can he erect any other than a sepulchral monument to faith? If the infinite and absolute are annihilated, reduced to nothing, in the eye of reason, has not the eye of faith also lost the very objects of its vision? This is the point to which our discussion leads; but to come to it in an intelligible way we must first expound the Hamiltonian theory of knowledge.

And perhaps we cannot better introduce this matter than by a statement of Hamilton's relation to Kant's theory of knowledge. The object of Kant's Criticism of the Pure Reason was twofold; on the one hand, as against the sceptics (Hume and others), to show that there are in the human mind *à priori* (or transcendental) elements of knowledge, and that these are found in the sphere of sense, and in the laws of the understanding, as well as in the ideas of reason. The mind, by an internal necessity, is compelled to recognize these. On the other hand, as against the dogmatist, Kant's position was, that even this transcendental (that is, *à priori*) knowledge does not attain with entire certainty to the nature of things, to things as they are in themselves. We can, by reason, neither demonstrate, nor yet disprove, the real being of objects corresponding to the ideas of reason. That is, the ideas are necessary, but the objects are still to be sought for. The proof of their existence is to be on other grounds. Yet, at the same time, if this proof can be found in any other way, there is nothing in reason to contradict it, or incompatible with it. On the contrary, since reason has these ideas as its vital and necessary substance, if we can in any other way make out the proof that there are objects corresponding to these ideas, reason itself will welcome them, for these objects are the counterparts of its own ideas. These ideas, now, are those of the Infinite, of the Absolute, of God, of the Soul and its immortality, of the World as a real existence, etc. In his Criticism of the Practical Reason, Kant then gives the proof, on moral grounds, of the real being of God, the world, etc. This is the positive part of his system, by which he sought to fill up the void which pure reason left in the universe. But Kant's theory, notwithstanding these qualifications, has been generally esteemed, in England and

Scotland,* to be unsatisfactory, and even to lead to scepticism; and this, because it denied to reason a valid authority in the premisses, threw the burden of proof upon our moral nature alone, and thus left an apparent schism in the soul. His system seems to throw discredit upon the three grand ideas of God, the soul, and the world, and to annul the possibility, so far as reason is concerned, of the three corresponding sciences, Theology, Cosmology, and Rational Psychology. And in this sense, too, it was further developed in the subsequent German speculations.

How now does Hamilton stand related to this theory? He simply adopts all that Kant asserts about the limits of reason, but finds fault with him for not going far enough. He regards "as conclusive," Kant's analysis of Time and Space into conditions of thought.† But he says, that in making a distinction between Reason and Understanding, he is grievously at fault.

* Also in France. Thus Cousin in his *Philosophie de Kant* (p. 318): "Nous avons fait voir que la Critique de la raison pure, mal tempérée par celle de la raison pratique, n'est qu'un scepticisme inconséquent." De Remusat, in his *Essais de Philosophie* (p. 419 sq.), gives a correct general view of the position of Kant: "Son scepticisme est d'un genre particulier. Kant nous défend également de douter, et d'affirmer, de douter pour notre propre compte, et d'affirmer pour le compte de nature. . . . Kant ne dit pas que les croyances objectives soient nécessairement des erreurs; ce sont plutôt des croyances sans titres, des inductions gratuites, que de mensongères apparences. Bien plus, illusions ou vérités, elles sont inévitables, naturelles, indispensables; le sens commun en vit. . . . Le scepticisme de Kant est plein de foi," etc. *Comp. Zeitschrift f. Philos.* 1860, p. 242.

† *Discussions*, p. 23 *et seq.* The editors of Hamilton's *Metaphysics*, in the Appendix, p. 647, have given "Fragments from Early Papers. Probably before 1836," in which Hamilton says that his "doctrine holds . . . that Space and Time, as given, are real forms of thought *and conditions of things*;" and that Kant's doctrine reduced them to "mere spectral forms, which have no real archetype in the noumenal or real universe." But Kant certainly held them to be "real forms of thought," and the *Discussions* say, that his analysis of them into "conditions of thought" is "conclusive." If Hamilton, now, held, as this Appendix declares, that they are also "conditions of things," how could he regard Kant's analysis as "conclusive"? Either this Fragment must be of an earlier date (before 1829, when the article on the Philosophy of the Unconditioned was published), or Hamilton is quite inconsistent in his statements. Besides, Kant did not assert, the very spirit of his philosophy as *critical*, prevented him from asserting, "that space and time have no real archetypes" in the external world. Some of his critics (as Fries and Apelt), interpret him as allowing their external reality.

“Why distinguish Reason from the Understanding, simply on the ground that the former is conversant about, or rather tends toward, the unconditioned; when it is sufficiently apparent that the unconditioned is conceived only as the negative of the conditioned, and also that the conception of contradictories is one.” Further, Kant “ought to have shown that the unconditioned can have no objective application, *because it had in fact no subjective affirmation*,—that it afforded no real knowledge, because it contained nothing even conceivable—and that it is self-contradictory, because it is not a notion either simple or positive, but a *fasciculus of negations*,” etc. In another Fragment (p. 647 of the *Metaphysics*), Hamilton speaks thus: Kant “endeavored to evince that pure Reason, that Intelligence, is naturally, is necessarily, repugnant with itself, and that speculation ends in a series of insoluble antilogies. In its highest potency, in its very essence, thought is thus infected with contradictions; and the worst and most pervading scepticism is the melancholy result. If I have done any thing meritorious in philosophy, it is in the attempt to explain the phenomena of these contradictions, in showing that they arise only when intelligence transcends the limits to which its legitimate exercise is restricted; and that within these bounds (the Conditioned), natural thought is neither fallible nor mendacious.”

These extracts make it apparent, that, as far as our intelligent nature is concerned, the philosophy of Hamilton is a more thorough-going scepticism than that of Kant. He would abolish the distinction between the Reason and the Understanding, simply because his theory leaves nothing for Reason to do, except to gaze upon a blank, to meditate upon a negation. The German left the unconditioned, real in the eye of reason; the Scotchman, abolishing the object, finds no need of the organ. With the latter, the unconditioned has not even “a subjective affirmation.” What reason, then, can he give for charging Kant with scepticism, which does not rebound with fatal accuracy upon himself? Does not he also hold, “that thought in its highest potency is infected with contradictions”—and contradictions, too, that involve the absolute negation of the unconditioned? If these contradictions led Kant to “the worst

and most pervading scepticism," how can they do otherwise with Hamilton? His plea here is curious. He avoids the scepticism by saying, that these contradictions only show that "intelligence has transcended its legitimate exercise." Of course, there cannot be any scepticism about the unconditioned, if we have no idea of it; this is nihilism and not scepticism. No contradiction remains, when one of the terms is abolished. The procedure, though violent, is conclusive. But, as between Kant and Hamilton, the matter stands simply thus: Kant, affirming the subjective necessity of the unconditioned, leaves room for proof, on any other grounds than that of Pure Reason, of a reality corresponding to the idea;* but Hamilton, resolving the unconditioned into an "inconceivability," a "negation," leaves no such room; if you attempt the proof you have not got any thing positive to prove. You want to prove the existence of God as unconditioned. Kant says you may, because the unconditioned is a reality in thought; Hamilton must say, the attempt is futile, because you are to prove something utterly inconceivable, a non-entity to thought. We do not agree with Kant's view of the unconditioned, as having merely a subjective rational necessity; we do not see why Pure Reason may not give us the objective, as much as the Practical Reason; why the former is any more subjective than the latter. But yet it seems to us that Kant's position is every way preferable to Hamilton's. The latter is here not only not Scotch, but more Kantian than Kant himself, on the very point most open to objection in the German system. Kant, allowing that Pure Reason asserts the subjective validity and necessity of our highest rational ideas, left room for practical reason to affirm their objective validity, and for a reconciliation of the subjective and objective. Hamilton, denying the

* Thus Kant in his *Prolegomena zur Metaphysik*, iii. § 60, says: "These transcendental ideas, even if they do not directly contribute to a positive knowledge, (of what is objective), are still of service in annulling the insolent assertions of materialism, naturalism and fatalism, which contract the field of reason—and thus they gain a foothold for our moral ideas, beyond the sphere of mere speculation." Now this advantage, restricted though it be, is just what is forfeited on the basis of Hamilton's theory.

subjective authority, and even reality, of these ideas, making reason to deny them, leaves no chance for our moral nature to affirm them, without setting itself in opposition to our rational nature. All that Hamilton can affirm, at the utmost, is, that we believe in "the incognizable and the inconceivable;" while Kant could say, we believe in the objective reality of that which reason also stamps as necessary and true to itself.

But the views of Hamilton, as a consistent and logical thinker, run back into his general theory about the powers of the mind and the nature of knowledge. His metaphysical system rests upon his psychology and his logic; and, in fact, his logic determines his metaphysics.

The first point in his psychology, significant of the character of his system, is his denial of any real distinction between the Reason and the Understanding; not merely a denial of the propriety of applying these terms to different functions, or relations, of the intelligence (for the word is here of small account), but his denial that there is any such specific difference in the mode of our intelligent or intellectual activity, as may be denoted by these words. Accordingly, he calls upon his class at one time to remark, that he avoids the use of the term "idea;" his words for the highest acts or objects of thought are "concept" or "notion." His reason, now, for abolishing this distinction is hinted at in the passage above cited from his Discussions; he will not allow reason to be a distinguishable capacity, because its alleged objects (the Infinite and Absolute, etc.), are merely negations of thought; and we do not, of course, require a special power to know a negation—"the knowledge of contradictories is one."

But does he not, it may be asked, allow the existence of a capacity to apprehend necessary truths, and call by the name of Common Sense, or the Regulative Faculty, what others call the Reason? And does he not expressly identify the two? (See *Metaphysics*, p. 277, 285, 681.) And does he not also call this, the *locus principiorum*? He does this: but, under what restriction and condition? Simply, under the restriction, that the highest capacity of the intelligence, shall be "cabin'd and confined" to the conditioned: and that all the unconditioned

shall be thrown out as a negative quantity. If Kant had only done this, he says, he would have attained to the true philosophy, and modified all his categories (*Discussions*, p. 25; *Metaphysics*, p. 681,) and "given a totally new aspect to his *Critique*": which is undoubtedly true.

Does he not also, it is inquired, recognize the existence of universal and necessary truths, and even "anxiously" insist upon them? There is no room for doubt there, either. But he introduces a "new" kind of necessity, which "all preceding philosophers" have overlooked, viz. "a negative necessity," a necessity springing, not from the mind's power, but from its powerlessness; and under this negative necessity, which simply means, that the mind cannot think them, he puts the substantial elements of reason. Thus in his *Metaphysics*, p. 526, when discussing the principle on which our ultimate cognitions are dependent, he grants that "the quality of necessity" is what discriminates a "native from an adventitious notion." But "it is evident, that the quality of necessity in a cognition may depend on two different and opposite principles, inasmuch as it may either be the result of a power, or of a powerlessness, of the thinking principle." Mathematical truths, the "notions" of existence, space and time, and the logical rules, are positive. "But besides these there are other necessary forms of thought, which by all philosophers have been regarded as standing on precisely the same footing, which to me seem to be of a totally different kind. In place of being the result of a power, the necessity which belongs to them is merely a consequence of the impotence of our faculties." And then he goes on and applies this to space and time, as infinite or absolute, and to causality; and says it likewise applies to the idea, or, as he would say, "notion" of substance. All these, and kindred truths, belong to common sense, simply under the category of imbecility and inconceivability. Is this good, sound, old-fashioned Scotch philosophy? And he is here almost right in intimating, that "all philosophers" have had an entirely different view. Most, even of the empirical philosophers, have been content with trying to prove that we have no faculty by which we can know the highest spiritual truths; but

here is a more dexterous method; if all the appropriate objects of the faculty are annihilated in the view of reason, all that remains for any supposed faculty to do is to gaze upon an empty void—certainly a very unprofitable performance, even for a philosopher. The very grandeur of the human mind, by the consent of the greatest thinkers and theologians of all times, has been made to consist in its power of knowing the real being of an Infinite and Absolute First Cause. Its weakness has been put in the capacity of fathoming what it yet knows as the most real and positive of beings. But Hamilton transforms its power into a powerlessness, its grandeur into an imbecility.

And there is here a great underlying question, with which he never grapples, though it is cardinal in psychology. Is it not of the very nature of Reason to have an immediate knowledge or vision of spiritual truth and being, even as perception gazes upon and knows directly the phenomena of sense? Is not the knowledge of spiritual things as immediate and as real (to say the least) as the knowledge of material things? If in perception, as Hamilton so cogently shows, we are immediately cognizant (even conscious of) an external reality; are we not also cognizant, in as direct a way, of what is above the limitations of time and sense? He has proved, that no fictions of ideas intervene between perception and its objects. The same theory of knowledge, applied in the spiritual domain, would lead to a like inference as to the truths and facts, which he so violently banishes into the sphere of negations—as if they were the products of a logical art, born of the principle of contradiction. On any consistent theory of knowledge, the ideas of reason are no more subjective than the perceptions of sense. All knowledge implies an object as well as a subject. Human reason is not the seat, so much as it is the organ, of principles; just as sense is not the seat of phantasms, but the organ by which we know phenomena. By a higher right than can be claimed in the philosophy of perception for a real knowledge of its objects, we may also claim, that reason beholds its objects with an unveiled face. The phantasms of the schools have been swept away from the theory of natural vision; but those

other phantasms, the abstractions of sense mistaken for the realities of reason, still remain to perplex our vision and our philosophy.

The bearing and relation of the Hamiltonian theory will become still more apparent, when we consider his more precise statements about thought or knowledge. They are all shaped by the same bias; and they are in the main consistently shaped. In the Appendix to his Discussions (p. 567, sq.) is an articulate statement of the *Conditions of the Thinkable Systematised: Alphabet of Human Thought*, containing his "matured" views. All thinking is here distributed first of all into Negative and Positive. Thinking is *negative*, (i. e. "a negation of thought") when existence is not mentally affirmed—Nothing. This negative thinking is of two kinds, inasmuch as the one or the other of the conditions of positive thinking is violated. These conditions are *non-contradiction* and *relativity*. Violating the condition of non-contradiction, we have the *really impossibile* (*nihil purum*). Violating the condition of relativity, we have the *inconceivable* (*nihil cogitabile*); "what may exist, but what we are unable to conceive existing. This impossible, the schools have not contemplated." It is under this last, that the unconditioned, the absolute, cause, etc., come. They are simply inconceivable—impossible to thought. What now is *positive* thinking or thought? His general statement is, "Thinking is Positive (and this in propriety is the only real thought), when *existence* is predicated of an object." It can be brought to bear only under two conditions: 1. *Non-contradiction*; 2. *Relativity*. As to the first, Non-contradiction—this condition is insuperable; it is a law of thought as well as of things. To violate it, gives the impossible; to satisfy it gives only the *Not-impossible*. It involves three laws: the logical laws of *Identity*, *Contradiction*, and *Excluded middle*. That is, there is no thought, no thinking, excepting as conformed to the laws of logic; the logical laws are the metes and bounds of thinking. The other condition of positive thought is *relativity*—"the conditionally relative, and not the absolutely or infinitely relative." This is not a law of *things*, but of *thought*; "for we find that there are contradictory opposites, one of which,

by the rule of Excluded Middle, must be true, but neither of which can by us be positively thought, as possible." Under this come (omitting the divisions) the necessary and primary relations of Self and Not-self, Substance and Quality, Time, Space, and Degree, and a host of contingent or derivative relations.

Such is Hamilton's general theory of knowledge, apart from its application to particular points. It is repeated substantially in the same form in different parts of his Works,—with additional illustrations in his *Metaphysics*, p. 526, *seq.*, 679–681, and *Logic*, Lectures v and vi; it is also at the basis of Mansel's *Prolegomena Logica*, and of his *Lectures on the Limits of Religious Thought*. It is the theory of knowledge, on the ground of which all thought of the Infinite and Absolute is demonstrated to be impossible. This particular application of it we do not yet consider, but would now only inquire whether this be a correct theory of all thought or thinking.

In this theory it is supposed that all possible knowledge is included. And what the theory amounts to is this—that all real thought is either logical thinking, or the thought only of relations. If the logical laws are violated, we have the *really impossible*: if the law of relativity is violated, we have the *impossible to thought* (*nihil cogitabile*). As far, now, as the logical laws are concerned (resting on the principle of contradiction, or rather, of non-contradiction), these can only give a necessity of thought, but cannot give a knowledge of existence. As Hamilton himself says, the argument from Contradiction is “negative, but not positive; it may refute, but it is incompetent to establish. It may show what is not, but never of itself, what is.” And further: “It analyses what is given, but does not originate information, or add any thing, through itself, to our stock of knowledge.” In short, it may be a negative test, but cannot be a positive source of knowledge. If I want to find out whether I have an idea of any thing as existent, or as real, logic cannot tell me: the appeal must be to what is before or behind all logic, that is, to immediate consciousness. All that these logical laws can do, is to keep me from applying contradictory predicates to any exist-

ence. But the materials upon which logic works must all be taken from some other source than itself. *Knowledge* is not derived from these logical laws; ideas are not; truths are not; intuitions are not, etc. This is so evident, as soon as the nature and province of logic are correctly grasped, that it would hardly be necessary to dwell upon it, had not Hamilton (as may appear in the sequel) himself urged these logical laws beyond their strict and proper application.

The other form or mode of positive thought is that of *relativity*, or the knowledge of relations. And in Hamilton's scheme, as he himself expounds it, this mode of knowledge is the only real knowledge of existence which men can have. Here is the grand assumption contained in this Alphabet of Human Thought. All *affirmation of existence* which the mind can make, all that it can conceive to exist, is in relations, is that which is relative. All else, all but relations, it is in the very nature of thought impossible to think—that is, *to affirm that it exists*. He does not merely say that the mind cannot grasp or comprehend any thing but relations; but he says, that thought cannot affirm the existence of any thing but relations. All else is “impossible to thought.” This assumption is the underlying principle of the whole theory. In its nature and consequences it deserves a careful consideration.

It is difficult to say just what Sir W. Hamilton means by the proposition, that all our knowledge is only relative. Sometimes he uses it as equivalent to the statement, that we can know only what is related to us (subjective); sometimes as meaning, that we can know only relations, or phenomena—in distinction from knowing the essence or substance; sometimes, and most frequently, he means by it, that we can be cognizant only of the relative, the finite, the phenomenal, in distinction from, or in opposition to, a knowledge of the absolute and the infinite. In his summary about it (*Metaphysics*, p. 104) he says “that knowledge is relative; 1°. Because existence is not cognizable, absolutely and in itself, but only in special modes. 2°. Because these modes can be known only if they stand in a certain relation to our faculties. 3°. Because the modes, thus relative to our faculties, are presented to, and known by,

the mind only under modifications determined by these faculties themselves." On p. 102, in introducing the subject, he says: "That whatever we know is not known as it is, *but only as it seems to us to be.*" And in the Appendix, pp. 688, 689, he has a further statement of the "doctrine of Relation," written in connection with a proposed Memoir of Mr. Stewart, in which he states (in substance) that "every Relation supposes at least two things, or, as they are called, terms thought as relative;" that "a relation is a unifying act,—a synthesis; but it is likewise an antithesis;" and that "relatives are *severally discriminated*; inasmuch as the one is specially what is referred, the other what is referred to"—the relative and correlative; and further, "that relations always coëxist in nature and in thought"—so that "*we cannot conceive, we cannot know, we cannot define the one relative, without, pro tanto, conceiving, knowing, defining also the other;*" and this he says, is "equivalent to a declaration that the Absolute (the non-Relative) is for us incogitable, and even incognizable." In another passage (*Discussions*, p. 574) he makes the knowledge of the relative to be a synonym for a knowledge of "the conditioned, the phenomenal, the finite." Taking these various statements together, what is the purport of the doctrine that we know only the Relative?

So far as it asserts, in general terms, that we can know only what is related to us and our faculties, it is doubtless true, and almost a truism. All knowledge implies and involves a relation between the subject knowing and the object known. The act of knowing can be construed only under this relation. But this manifestly decides nothing as to the character of the objects known; it has nothing to do with the propositions, that we can know only relations and not substances, or, that we can know only the relative and not the absolute. It only says, that we cannot know any thing, be it relations or substances, the relative or the absolute, without an act of knowledge in relation to it. In knowing the absolute, for example, a relation between us and the absolute is implied—that is, the relation of knowing. It amounts to saying, that we cannot know any thing without knowing it.

But let us advance another step. The doctrine of relative knowledge may also mean, that what we know is known only under the modifications imposed by our faculties themselves, that is, the subject determines the object. This is carried to its extreme in the statement of Hamilton (above), "that whatever we know is not known as it is, but *only as it seems to us to be.*" The doctrine of relative knowledge then means, that we do not know any thing as objectively real, but simply as having a subjective validity and worth. But Hamilton's doctrine of perception, that we are immediately cognizant of the objective, is, it seems to us, opposed to this. And the true theory of knowledge is also opposed to it. To be sure, we know only through and by our faculties; but may not our faculties be such as to give us a direct, an immediate knowledge of objective reality whether material or spiritual? The medium is transparent. This is the case with all intuitions. In all real knowledge the object determines the subject, as much as the subject the object. The mind can know what is entirely different from itself; and this Hamilton himself concedes, when arguing about perception. (*Metaphysics*, p. 351, 401, *seq.*) The position, "that whatever we know is not known as it is, but only as it seems to us to be," also resolves, in its very statement, all knowledge into an illusion, and a conscious illusion to boot. We know that we know only the seeming; how can we know this, unless we also know that there is a difference between the seeming and the real? and how can we know that there is a real, if all that we know or can know is only a seeming? Subjective idealism is the only consistent result of this theory of knowledge.—And, at any rate, granting the theory, it is still something very diverse from the positions, that we can know only relations or only the relative. It does not begin to prove either of these positions. For, though the mind can know only in a knowing relation, and though it can know only under the modification of its faculties—the whole question remains, Are these faculties such that they can be cognizant objectively only of relations or of the relative? And even if it were shown that we could know only relations, it is still to be proved that we can also know only the relative (in distinction from the absolute).

Can the mind, then, know only relations of objects? That is the next possible sense of the theory of relative knowledge. The proposition here is in respect to relations among the objects of knowledge, and not to the relation between the subject knowing and the object known. But here, again, very different affirmations may be confounded and need to be distinguished. The mind is cognizant only of the relations of objects; this may mean, that as all objects are related to each other, the mind knows the objects only in these their relations; or it may mean, that the mind knows only the relations of objects, and not the objects themselves—only the phenomena and not the essence or substance.

That Hamilton, under relative knowledge, included the first of these, is apparent from his scheme of relativity (*Discussions*, p. 567), where substance and quality, degree, etc., are adduced as instances of relativity; from his express statement (p. 569), that “the relations of existence” (that is, the relations “in the object of knowledge, the thing thought about”), are what he refers to. And here what is true in the theory is perhaps to be found. All the objects of existence and of knowledge are presented to us in relations; no object in being or in thought is isolated, is unrelated. And we know the objects, too, in part, in a great measure it may be, in and through these their relations. But this does not prove that we know only the phenomena and not the substance, only the activity and not the agent, only the relations and not the objects. And this last proposition is the one which the theory requires. In reference to and against it we urge the following considerations.

It does not follow (1) from the position, that in all knowledge there is a relation of the knowing subject to the object known. There may, there must, be such a relation; but, then, why may not the relation as well be a direct one between the knower and the object, as between the knower and the relation? (2) An immediate knowledge of relations is just as difficult to be conceived as an immediate knowledge of the objects. If we can know relations directly and simply, there is nothing in the nature of knowledge to prevent us from knowing the objects as well. While, if all knowledge is reduced to subjectivity (if the

subject determines the object), we can no more know objective relations truly than any thing else ; and yet Hamilton implies that we can truly know these relations. (3) The knowledge of the relations of things is, in many cases, precisely the most difficult and inscrutable part of all our knowledge. Thus, the relation of self and not-self, that of substance and phenomena even, that of subject and its attributes, the relations of body and soul, the relation of time to eternity, of bounded to absolute space—here are some of the most difficult and inscrutable questions which perplex philosophy. (4) It is utterly inconceivable that we should know a relation, when in ignorance of what is related (i. e. of the related objects). It is the objects themselves that go to make up the relation. Such knowledge would be like a knowledge of the copula between a subject and predicate, while ignorant of the subject and predicate themselves. In the very relation the nature or character of the objects related is expressed. And Hamilton, when treating of the doctrine of relations by itself (*Metaphysics*, p. 689), as we have already cited him, says : “The relations (the *things* relative and correlative) as relative, always coëxist in nature and coëxist in thought. . . We cannot conceive, we cannot know, we cannot define the one relative, without, *pro tanto*, conceiving, knowing, defining also the other.” (5) Applied to the relation of substance and phenomena, of essence and attributes (as when it is said we know the phenomena but not the substance), the very law of relativity is violated, when we say that we know the phenomena and do not know the substance, for these are mutually related terms. And since the phenomena reveal the substance or essence, we certainly know as much about the essence as we do about the phenomena. If, in any case, the essence were fully expressed in the phenomena, we should know the full essence. As applied to mind, we certainly have a direct knowledge of self in every act of consciousness. And as applied to material or external objects, we have a distinct conception about each individual, quite different from its phenomenal activity. (6) Hamilton’s definition, oft-repeated, of *positive knowledge* is inconsistent with this theory. That definition is, that positive thinking is the “*affirmation of existence.*”

“Thinking is POSITIVE when *existence* is predicated of an object.” Now, we do mentally predicate existence of substances and essences, as well as of phenomena; we do this so distinctly and necessarily, that we say the phenomenal is only phenomenal, and contrast it with a permanent, underlying nature or essence, which we know to be there. So that, in fact, our *positive* thinking is of the substance and not of the phenomena. Else were this whole universe to us an “insubstantial pageant.”

The other form in which the relational theory of knowledge is held is, that we know only the relative in distinction from the absolute. “We think,” says Hamilton (*Metaph.* p. 689), “one thing only as we think two things, mutually and at once; which again is equivalent to a declaration that the Absolute (the Non-relative) is for us incogitable, and even incognizable.” The general question here suggested as to the knowledge of the absolute, and whether this be only negative, we cannot now enter upon. We concede, that an absolute which is not related to us and to our powers of knowing, we cannot know, any more than we can know a relative, which is not related to us. A non-relative, in this sense, is of course incogitable. It may also be true, that we cannot know the absolute apart from the relative—a merely abstract absolute; the knowledge of the two may be indissolubly connected. But the real question is, Can we know the absolute as well as the relative? Can we affirm, in positive thought, the existence of the one as well as of the other? And as to this we might ask, how can we know even the relative, without having an idea of the absolute? Are not the two terms correlative? It seems to us, that so far is it from being true that we know only the relative, that the fact of the case is, we could not say *relative*, unless we also thought *absolute*; the former word implies the latter just as much as effect implies cause. And when we come to the heart of the matter, it will be found, we think, that the absolute is that which is most positive in thought, and that the stigma of negation is rather to be applied to the relative; for all that is relative implies a negation. But we cannot now pursue this point any further.*

* Hamilton quite uniformly, bating occasional inconsistencies, uses the words absolute and infinite, not only as logical contradictions of each other (so that, e. g.

The Hamiltonian theory of knowledge, as we have seen, divides all thought into negative and positive; makes all positive knowledge, all that is thinkable, to be simply and solely of the relative, the conditional, the finite, the phenomenal. All else is really impossible, or impossible to thought. Of course, then, all that distinguishes God from the creature is, at least, impossible to thought—it surpasses the bounds of conceivability. All the predicates by which God is defined, in distinction from the phenomenal, express inconceivabilities, are mere negative notions, indicate the absence of thought. This is the case with the terms infinite, absolute, first cause, substance or essence;—immensity, eternity, self-existence, independence of being, etc., must also fall under the same category of inconceivability. And not only so, but many of the fundamental beliefs of the human mind, those principles which formed the very substance of the common sense of the Scotch school—all of them, in short, which do not express mere phenomenal relations, come under the same category. In respect to some of them (Cause and Substance, and even Free Will), Hamilton concedes this; and in respect to others, the same arguments and reasons apply.

It becomes, therefore, a most important inquiry, in estimat-

if God be absolute he cannot be infinite), but so that both are logical contradictories of the relative and finite; that is, as pure negations, non-relative, non-finite. And he every where implies that this is their only sense. So that, if they should be taken as positive, the relative and the finite would be negated, would be lost in them. We may speak of this more fully hereafter. Dr. Hickok, in his *Rational Cosmology*, Chapter I, examines the idea of the Absolute in a thorough manner, and makes the necessary distinctions between the absolute in the understanding, and the absolute as given in the reason. Professor Ulrici, of Halle, editor of the *Zeitschrift f. Philosophie*, one of the most vigorous opponents of the pantheistic schemes, in a review of Hamilton (*Zeitschrift*, Bd. 27, p. 62), says, that taking the absolute as purely negative, it is of course incogitable; but he adds that here is the very question, namely, "Whether it be a mere negation, or whether the negation here is not a mere consequence of the positive contents of the idea of the absolute. We maintain the latter. We hold that the absolute is not conditioned by any thing else, and so far it is the unconditioned, but yet only because it is itself the *positive* condition of every thing else." And he says that Hamilton's own principle that 'consciousness is only possible under plurality and difference,' necessitates the inference "that the relative and conditional, as such, cannot be thought without distinguishing it from the independent and absolute, which condition it (i. e. the relative), and therefore are themselves unconditioned."

ing the philosophy of the conditioned, how the sceptical results, which seem to lie so near at hand, are to be avoided. By banishing all these truths from the sphere of reason and thought, the absolute philosophy was refuted, was annihilated. But still Hamilton was a Scotchman, and believed in an infinite and absolute God, in the immensity of space and the eternity of time, in cause and substance, in free will and motion. To his intellect they were merely inconceivable, mere negatives. But still they *were*—they were *real*—they were forms and modes of being. His philosophy, his logic, said *no* to them; but something else in him was always saying *yes*. What is that something else? He could not be a sceptic, still less a nihilist, even though his intellect was perpetually saying, *nihil purum* or *nihil cogitabile*, to the infinite and the absolute cause.

And the way in which he tried to get out of this difficulty, so as to affirm what he denied, and deny what he affirmed, seems to us to be one of the most remarkable feats, or rather succession of feats, to be found in the annals of philosophy. He was like a strong man bound by his own logical withes; and the vigor and dexterity of his powers are no where more conspicuous than in the hopeless attempts and desperate theoretic shifts to which he had recourse. He could not, and would not, accept the simple affirmation of reason, of consciousness, as to the real being of what is absolute, of cause, substance, and the like; but believing in them still, he must somehow or other make this square with the position that they are negative and inconceivable. He did this, partly in a psychological way, and partly in a logical way.

Psychologically, the way he met the difficulty was this. He hypostatized the imbecility of the mind into a function, and its powerlessness into a power, and made the very impotence of thought to be the source of all these fundamental ideas. By this arduous process, he seemed to think, that what is negative in thought, might still be held as positive in belief; that what is logically inconceivable, might be made the firm foundation of religion and ethics. Reason, he says, does not here deceive, for reason has nothing to do in the matter; it is all out of its province. To reason it is indeed all night; but the very

imbecility of the intellect ushers us into the presence of the most august truths, the very negation of thought gives us the most positive and real of our beliefs. And he rather prides himself on this discovery; he not unfrequently boasts of it as something which has escaped "all preceding philosophers." That we do him no injustice in these statements, will be seen from a few citations. In the *Dissertations*, p. 23, he says: "By a wonderful revelation, we are thus, in the very consciousness of our inability to conceive aught above the relative and finite, inspired with a belief in the existence of something unconditioned beyond the sphere of all comprehensible reality. In his *Metaphysics*, p. 526: "The imbecility of the human mind constitutes a great negative principle, to which sundry of the most important phenomena of the intelligence [*sic*] may be referred." In the same connection, speaking of "necessary forms of thought," he says there are some which "all philosophers" have regarded as positive, but "which seem to me to be of a totally different kind. In place of being the result of a power, the necessity which belongs to them is merely a consequence of the impotence of our faculties;" and then he applies this to space and time, cause, etc. (Yet still he verbally implies that they "are necessary forms of thought.") In another passage, p. 681, he says: "These and such-like impotencies of positive thought have been strangely overlooked." In the same work, p. 548, even "*the Conditioned*," it is said, is to be viewed, "not as a power, but as a powerlessness of the mind;" but this is so strange a position, that we are half inclined to think there must be a misprint in the text. Once more, in the *Metaphysics*, Appendix V, speaking of Kant's conclusive analysis of Judgments, into *analytic* and *synthetic*, Hamilton says, that "he omitted a third kind . . . which do not seem to spring from a positive power of the mind, but only from the inability of the mind to conceive the contrary." And these "negative, synthetic judgments," he adds, are equivalent to the Common Sense of Reid. The truths, then, which Reid derived from Common Sense, Hamilton derives from this impotency of the mind to conceive either

them, or the contrary of them. Would Reid have regarded this as a valid support of his theory?

But besides this imbecility, or impotence of the mind, as the source of its most vital beliefs, Hamilton also has a logical method of arriving at the same result. Logic, in fact, shows us how the mental imbecility can perform the operation. And here is where the theory becomes stranger than fiction; but it is so often reiterated, that we are compelled to believe, that its author held it to be perfectly valid. The phenomenon to be accounted for, let us recollect, is this: All positive thought leaves the Infinite and Absolute, Cause, Substance, etc., a blank, a negation; but yet we believe in them. The absolute philosophy is annulled by the negation; how is the Scotch faith to be saved? To leave it all in the position of "a negation of all thought" would look too much like nihilism; but yet, in "thought" there is no means of rescue. Is there not some method left? Yes, there is one such. Positive thinking is realized under two conditions, viz. the logical laws (*non-contradiction*), and *relativity*. If the logical laws be violated, we have a mere impossibility. But if the law of relativity be violated, we have, not an absolute impossibility, but only an incogitability (*a nihil cogitabile*). But the measure of thought is not the measure of being (of course not, but is it not the measure of any possible knowledge of being to us? But we let that pass.) Now—if it can be demonstrated, even though we cannot conceive it, that this "incognizable and incogitable" Infinite and Absolute must still *be*—then, we may save the belief, though we deny that positive thinking has any thing to do with it. And it is the attempt at such a logical demonstration of the real being of what we cannot conceive to be, which makes the specialty of Hamilton's system. Most persons would have thought it much simpler just to say, the mind compels us to such belief. That, however, in Hamilton's system would leave the belief in just a contradictory relation to the thought. But if the logical law of non-contradiction itself compels to the belief, then the triumph of logic is complete; and the Scotch philosophy is saved, while the German absolutists are annihilated. And Hamilton prepares for this consummation in

various ways ; he makes, e. g. different sorts of necessary ideas—one sort being derived from the mind's impotency ; he proposes a new division (as we have seen above) of Kant's synthetic judgments—a "synthetic negative," etc. But the consummation itself we must give in his own words : it is announced not infrequently as "a grand law of thought," which is to solve the difficulties inhering in the philosophy of nescience.

The first hint of it is in the article on Cousin (*Discussions*, p. 22) : "The conditioned is the mean between two extremes—two inconditionates exclusive of each other, neither of which *can be conceived as possible*, but of which, on the principle of Contradiction and Excluded Middle,* *one must be admitted as necessary.*" The mind, it is added, "is not represented as conceiving two propositions subversive of each other, as equally possible ; but only, as unable to understand as possible either of two extremes ; one of which however, on the ground of their mutual repugnance, it is compelled to recognize as true." In the Appendix, p. 569, speaking of Relativity, as a condition of positive thought, he says : "We should not think it as a law of *things*, but merely as a law of *thought* ; for we find that there are contradictory opposites, *one of which*, by the rule of Excluded Middle, *must be true*, but neither of which can by us be positively thought as possible." (Under this come, not only the Infinite, but also *substance*, "which cannot be conceived by us, except negatively" (p. 570) ; *time* as infinite or eternal, and even "time present is conceivable only as a negation ;" so too, *motion* ; *space*, as either infinitely unbounded, or absolutely bounded ; *degree*, as either absolute or relative ; and even *cause* is resolved into this "impotence to conceive either of two contradictories.") These same positions are frequently

* The law of Contradiction is this : we cannot affirm and deny the same predicate of the same subject at the same time. The principle of Excluded Middle (i. e. the middle between two contradictories) is this, that of Contradictory predicates we can only affirm one of an object ; if one be affirmed, the other is denied. It is the principle of disjunctive judgments. The first law (Non-Contradiction) says, *Alpha est, Alpha non est*—both propositions cannot be true. The law of Excluded Middle says, *Aut est Alpha aut non est*—one of these assertions is true, the other not. Hamilton's *Logic*, 62, *Metaphysics*, 526.

reiterated. In the *Metaphysics*, p. 527: "Now, then, I lay it down as a law which, though not generalized by philosophers, can be easily proved to be true by its application to phenomena: That all that is conceivable in thought, lies between two extremes, which, as contradictory of each other, cannot both be true, but of which, as mutual contradictories, one must. For example, we conceive space—we cannot but conceive space. . . . But space must be either bounded or not bounded. These are contradictory alternatives; on the principle of Contradiction they cannot both be true, and, on the principle of Excluded Middle, *one must be true.*" This is then applied to both the maximum and minimum of space; and to time, under the same categories. This he further says (p. 548), is the "Law of the Conditioned"—"that the conceivable has always two opposite extremes, and that the extremes are equally inconceivable;" a law, "which, however palpable when stated, has never been generalized so far as I know, by any philosopher" (p. 552). The same law is applied to Causality, at length; but of this we cannot now speak further. One other extract will complete our materials for forming a judgment of this theory. Speaking of the law of Contradiction (Appendix to *Metaphysics*, p. 680), he says, if left to it alone, "we should be unable competently to attempt any argument on some of the most interesting and important questions. For there are many problems in the philosophy of the mind, where the solution necessarily lies between what are, to us, the one or the other of two counter, and therefore, incompatible alternatives, neither of which we are able to conceive as possible, but of which, by the very condition of thought, we are compelled to acknowledge that the one or the other cannot but be; and it is as supplying this deficiency, that what has been called the argument from Common Sense becomes principally useful." And then he adds, that this principle of Contradiction has two forms; one, the *Logical*, is well known; the other—"what may be called the *Psychological* application—while it necessarily declares that, of Contradictories, both cannot, but one must, be, still bilaterally admits that we may be unable positively to think the possibility of

either alternative. This, the psychological phasis of the law, is comparatively unknown, and has been generally neglected." And then follow the usual illustrations about Existence, Space and Time.

To this scheme it were needless to deny the merit of great ingenuity, and even subtlety of thought. It is, at least, carrying the logical laws to their extreme limits of application; even if it does not surpass these limits. It seems at first sight to save, what Hamilton's general theory of knowledge left hopeless. Though, at the same time, the attempt, by logical thinking upon what cannot be thought, to demonstrate, that we must believe what we cannot conceive, would have deterred any less skilful thinker. And has he not after all been caught in the meshes of his own logic?

In considering this theory, we leave out of account several assumptions involved in it, which are liable to objection—or at least open to debate. One of these is, the general statement as to what constitutes positive thought—that it is found only in the sphere of the relative and finite. If positive thought consists, as Hamilton says, ultimately in the affirmation of existence—why may it not be applicable as well to absolute as to relative being? Another query would be as to the terms "thought" and "knowledge"—whether they can be lawfully restricted in the same way. Still another point would be, as to the nature even of "negative thinking"—whether the "negation of thought," in respect to any object, does not involve a denial of the real being of that object, so far as it is possible for us to know any thing about it.* Nor

* In a note to the second Edinburgh edition of his *Discussions* (not found in the American edition, but cited by Calderwood, p. 63), Hamilton says: "It might be supposed that Negative thinking, being a negation of thought, is in propriety a negation therefore of all mental activity. But this would be erroneous. . . . Even negative thought is realized only under the condition of Relativity and Positive thinking. For example, we try to think—to predicate existence in some way, but find ourselves unable. We then predicate *incogitability*, and if we do not always predicate, as an equivalent, (objective) *non-existence*, we shall never err." Calderwood, in the connection, shows the inconsistency between this statement, and Hamilton's previous strong assertion—that in all cases of negative thinking "*the result is nothing.*" If positive thinking be the affirmation of existence—

will we stop to comment on the statement so often made, that "all which is conceivable in thought, lies between two contradictory extremes, which are both equally inconceivable;" though it is difficult to see what this statement about "what is conceivable" (even if true) has to do with the case. It does not in the least affect the logical inference about the two contradictories; the conceivable is certainly not, in Hamilton's view, the *Excluded Middle* between these contradictories; for all that the law of Excluded Middle says, is, that of two contradictory predicates, we can only affirm one, and must deny the other.

But to come to the demonstration itself, viz. that the principle of Contradiction and Excluded Middle proves that there are cases of contradictory opposites, one of which must be true, but both of which are equally inconceivable, as e. g., that space is either bounded or unbounded—both inconceivable, one necessary: or, as Hamilton abusively contrasts the terms, space is either *absolute* (completed) or *infinite* (never can be completed); it cannot be both (by the law of contradiction), it must be one (by the law of excluded middle); yet both are equally incogitable. To this process, and its conclusion, we urge the following objections:

(1.) The demonstration is a logical one, and of course must involve a positive judgment, and *positive thought* in the conclusion. The principle of Contradiction cannot be applied except as there is both an affirmation and a negation. In drawing the conclusion, we affirm in thought one of the contradictory predicates. Space is either unbounded or bounded. If we decide for the unbounded, it is a positive affirmation that the unbounded is. And Hamilton himself can hardly state his case without implying the positive *thinking* which his theory denies. He calls it a "judgment," negative indeed, but still a "synthetic negative judgment." He calls it "*a law of thought*" "to think the unknown" (*Metaph.* p. 97), and then says (p. 99): "It is no object of knowledge." He makes it to be a "necessity"

negative thinking must mean "that existence is not attributed to an object." And how negative thinking can be no act of thinking, and yet a "mental activity," it is certainly difficult to divine.

of thought, although it be also negative. Thus admitting the process to be correct, it refutes his own position, that the thought in the case is merely negative.

(2.) But according to the terms of the proposed demonstration, it is utterly impossible that there should be such a judgment, as he declares to be logically necessary. The state of the case is this: we have two absolutely contradictory, and entirely inconceivable, predicates (the absolute and infinite, in his sense) to be applied to a given object. Now, if both are inconceivable, we cannot make any distinction between them. Both are to thought mere negations—that is, one and the same thing, or rather—nothing. Consequently they cannot be compared—still less put as contradictories. Thought sees a black blank in both, and consequently cannot decide between them. There is no case for adjudication. But if there be a case, then the inconceivabilities must be conceived, positively thought, as different, and distinguishable from each other. If they are, or can be, so thought, then, one at least of the contradictories is not a mere negative. So that either the process cannot be conducted, or the theory of negative thought is baseless.

(3.) But even supposing that their inconceivability did not prevent a decision—and that, on the principle of Excluded Middle, one of the contradictories must be true—logic could never tell us *which of them to take*. All that it can do is to put the dilemma before us, and say, between two negations of thought, two inconceivabilities, make your election. Space is limited or unlimited; time has or has not a beginning and an ending;—neither is conceivable, both cannot be true, one must be true. But which is true? Suppose I say “limited,” and my neighbor says “unlimited.” What here decides? Logic is speechless. It deserts us at the crisis.

But we make the decision, it may be said, by belief, by common sense; and this is what the doctrine of common sense means. But if this be so, then manifestly, the logical laws are not final, the law of excluded middle does not say the last word; there is a power above it, which is to declare, and which must declare, which of the two contradictory alternatives is true, and which is false. Logic merely brings the case before

this higher tribunal. You may call that ultimate arbiter, Common Sense, or Intuition, or Reason; but it is there, and says the last word, and forms the final judgment. And that judgment is the positive affirmation, that real objective truth belongs to one, and only one, of the alternatives. And as we have got to come to this at last, why not start with it? This logical bifurcation simply serves to set the decisions of reason and common sense in an indubitable light. As far as affirming the real being, the reality, of either of the opposite poles is concerned, it is simply a grand impertinence.

(4.) But that we must show more fully. Hamilton's process here is a violation of the very nature of formal Logic, according to his own definitions and statements. We do not now speak of logic in the higher sense in which some use it, as including the laws of being as well as of thought, but of logic as Hamilton always uses it, as the science of the laws of thinking. Used in this sense, it is impossible that it should give us objective reality; it has nothing to do with that. As Hamilton says, the argument from Contradiction is "negative, not positive; it may refute, but it is incompetent to establish. *It may show what is not, but never of itself what is.* It is exclusively Logical or Formal, not Metaphysical or real; it proceeds on a necessity of thought, *but never issues in an Ontology or knowledge of Existence.*" Here the metes and bounds of logic are fairly and fully stated. But in applying the laws of non-contradiction and excluded middle to the instances in hand—instead of limiting the application to the point, that thought must not violate, and must be conformed to, these laws, he makes these laws to determine ontological truth. He says, e. g., that the law of excluded middle declares, that one of the contradictory alternatives must be true in fact. But how does the proposition, that space must be either absolute or infinite, prove, that either absolute or infinite space *is*, and still more, which of them it is? any more than the proposition, that the soul must be either mortal or immortal, proves the being of the soul, or its mortality or immortality? * If the law

* Hamilton, in stating the law of Excluded Middle (*Logic*, p. 59) seems to prepare the way for the use he makes of it in the *Metaphysics*, saying, that "it

of contradiction be applied, it gives, at the utmost, the not-impossible, but not the real.

(5.) Still further, even if none of these objections hold, yet the logical bifurcation, in the alleged instances, in the sense in which Hamilton uses words, is not exhaustive—his dilemmas do not include the whole—his predicates do not embrace all the possibilities. We here refer particularly to his use of the terms absolute and infinite, as contradictory, and as exhaustive. Using, as he does, *absolute*, in the sense of a completed whole, and *infinite*, as meaning a whole that cannot be completed, he not only sets these two words in entire opposition (in this usage being himself in opposition to almost all philosophers), but he does not recognize the *positive infinite*, and the *unlimited absolute*; these do not come within his dilemmas. Space, e. g., he says, is either bounded, or unbounded (the latter in the negative sense, that we cannot find its bounds, or, cannot conceive it as made up of limited parts). But space, as positive immensity, he does not consider. It is not true, that space is only either absolute or infinite (in his sense), for there is a third possibility (and this is the real idea) viz. that space is above and beyond all limits. And this positive idea of infinite space is, in fact, what enables us to decide between the contradictory alternatives which he presents. So, too, of Time, of Cause, of Substance, etc. And, besides, this whole mode of ratiocination, which puts the infinite and the finite, the absolute and the relative, in the position of logical contradictories, is abusive, and may easily lead to dangerous consequences—compelling us to swallow up the finite in the infinite, or the infinite in the finite. Instead of opening the way to faith, it may open the door to scepticism.

And, now, as to the support which this argumentation gives to the philosophy of Common Sense, to Faith, to Belief, in short, to Religion—what must we say? As to its relation to Common Sense, the amount of the matter is this: if Common Sense be the real, final arbiter, this logical process is superflu-

announces that condition of thought which compels us, of two repugnant notions, which cannot both *coëxist*, to think either the one or the other as *existing*."

ous; but if this logical process be final, Common Sense is dethroned of all its Scotch dignities and exaltation. For, if this Common Sense was any thing, it was positive thought, affirming ultimate and absolute truth. It was not an impotency, but the highest positive power, of the human mind. But in the Hamiltonian system, it has got to decide between alternatives, both of which are "a negation of all thought." It puts us in the position, as he himself expresses it—that "our capacity of thought is peremptorily proved incompetent to what we necessarily think about;" and, can language express a more violent contradiction? This whole scheme undermines Common Sense, or Common Sense undermines the scheme. The case is the same with Belief.* This system annuls Belief, or Belief annuls the system. For the system calls upon belief to decide affirmatively in favor of an absolute negative; it leaves to belief no positive object of thought. Still further, how can the belief be construed, excepting as affirming the existence of that which is believed; if this existence be affirmed, it is positive thought, according to Hamilton's own definition of positive thought; if the existence is not affirmed, the belief is nugatory. But if the belief in an absolute being affirms its real existence, if positive thought be indispensably involved, then, too, all positive thinking is not of the relative and the finite. In short, if in belief there is thought, the system is refuted; if in belief there is no thought, belief is annihilated. And what a wonderful work belief is called upon to perform! It is called upon to decide between two equally inconceivable and absolutely contradictory positions; to decide, that one of these inconceivabilities has a real existence, and the other not; and to do this without any thought whatever. Its decision must not, cannot be, a *thought*;

* Very few statements as to the nature of Belief occur in Hamilton's works. In his *Logic*, p. 377, he says: "Knowledge is a certainty founded upon insight. Belief is a certainty founded upon feeling." P. 385: "We cannot believe without some consciousness or knowledge of the belief, and, consequently, without some consciousness or knowledge of the object of belief." But he dismisses the question of the relation of knowledge and belief, simply saying, that it is "one of the most difficult problems of metaphysics." And in his *Metaphysics*, the amount of what he says is, "that belief precedes knowledge."

for if it is, the theory is exploded. And the final dilemma is this: if the object of faith be purely negative and incogitable, it is also incredible; if it is credible, it cannot be merely negative and incogitable. The "intellectual intuition" of Schelling is reason itself, when compared with a blind faith in negations.

The bearings and relations of this system become of still higher importance, when viewed in respect to Religion. For, according to it, all the predicates by which we define God in contrast with the world, express what is utterly inconceivable, mere negative thought, and even "the negation of the very conditions under which thought is possible." There is a wide chasm between belief and reason—and no bridge spans the gulf. Faith is on one side—the intellect is on the other; and what the intellect declares to be negative, faith declares to be positive. On these principles, the conflict between faith and reason is one that can never be adjusted. And this negation of thought in respect to deity, it should be remembered, is not merely in respect to him as infinite or absolute, but it extends equally to him as cause, as substance, as creator; it does not concern merely his relations to space and time, but also his relations to the world as the product of his power. For this negative thought, when logically carried out, as Hamilton himself now and then seems to intimate, covers the case of all our primary beliefs, excepting the laws of logic, the axioms of mathematics, and time, space, and existence as finite. These latter beliefs are positive; but *all other beliefs are negative to thought*. This is the inmost sense of the Hamiltonian system. It makes metaphysics impossible, except as a science of the phenomenal; ethics impossible, except as a classification of duties; cosmology impossible, except as it is merely inductive; and theology impossible, as the science of the sciences.

In our examination of Hamilton's system in this article, we have confined ourselves to his general theory of knowledge, without investigating its application to particular ideas and truths. If his general theory be shown to be unsatisfactory, it will be more easy to judge about the particular instances. When opposed, it has generally been by refuting him in re-

spect to particular ideas; and many who have done this have implied or conceded the truth of his general principles about knowledge. But the core of Hamilton's system is in his theory of knowledge. This is neither Scotch nor German; it is a cross between. Its German elements refute its Scotch common sense; its Scotch sense is irreconcilable with its extreme Kantianism. It is the ingenious attempt of a strong intellect to extricate itself from metaphysical difficulties by logical laws. But neither metaphysics nor theology can allow, that logic is either the source or the measure of the fundamental truths of human reason.

ART. VIII.—THE ANTE-NICENE TRINITARIANISM.

By Prof. ROSWELL D. HITCHCOCK, D.D.

THE CHURCH OF THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES; or, *Notices of the Lives and Opinions of some of the Early Fathers, with Special Reference to the Doctrine of the Trinity, illustrating its late Origin and Gradual Formation.* By ALVAN LAMSON, D.D. Boston: Walker, Wise & Co., 245 Washington street. 1860. 8vo. Pp. 352.

OF historical treatises upon the first three Christian centuries, there would seem to be no end. No period of equal length has been already more frequently handled, or is likely to be more frequently handled in the time to come. From every prominent stand-point, whether ecclesiastical or doctrinal, scholarly and thinking men are eager to interrogate these heroic centuries, and make them lend their support to foregone conclusions. German fertility in this department of authorship, so long ago wondered at, is still astonishing. English scholarship, always strongly moved in this direction, received a new impulse from the Pusey excitement of some five and twenty

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