

THE PHILOSOPHY OF DR. McTAGGART

BY GILBERT T. SADLER

SINCE the publication of the second volume of *The Nature of Existence* which completes the work of this great Cambridge philosopher, Dr. McTaggart's credit has steadily risen. He was known in his lifetime as a brilliant debater and inspiring teacher: but, though he had published important works,¹ his great system of philosophy was only partially delivered to the public at the time of his death. It can now be studied in its completeness in the two volumes of *The Nature of Existence*. This work is the positive and logical presentation of what McTaggart desired to say. His previous works on Hegel and *Some Dogmas of Religion* had prepared the way for this last remarkable effort. Briefly, he believed the universe to be souls related in groups or primary wholes, or in one primary whole, perhaps. Their unity is a unity of system, not a unity in one Person or Super-Person or God or Unitive Mind. It is like a state, consisting of men. Thus McTaggart was both a Pluralist and a Monist: a Pluralist as to the sou's of which reality was composed: and a Monist as to the unifying love which united or related souls to one another, in varying degrees of love.

Such, in brief, was the philosophical result of years of study, discussion and tuition at Cambridge. Drafts of his books used to be submitted by McTaggart, to his friendly critics at Cambridge, ere he published his works.

It is necessary to state the main philosophical argument of Vol. I of *The Nature of Existence*, and then an estimate can be made of the value of the second volume recently published. Volume I

¹ His principal publications are: *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, Cambridge, 1896; *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology*, Cambridge, 1901; *Some Dogmas of Religion*, London, 1906; *The Relation of Time and Eternity*, Berkeley, 1908; *A Commentary on Hegel's Logic*, Cambridge, 1910; *The Nature of Existence, Vol. I*, Cambridge, 1921; *The Nature of Existence, Vol. II*, Cambridge, 1927.

declared that *only souls or selves exist, and their parts are perceptions, which are divisible ad infinitum*. All selves are related, each loving one other or a few, or a group of other souls or selves. Each is unique, and so has a sufficient description. No two plants, animals or men are exactly alike.

What exists then is souls, and so groups of souls, and parts of souls, and their perceptions: briefly, souls and their perceptions. And all are related and form a universe, whose unity is not a God of any kind, but it is love in all stages or degrees. Every substance (viz. selves, parts of selves, and groups of selves) is in relation to each other, and so each is unique, and with an infinity of relationships or qualities. Each self (or group of such, or parts of such) is unique to some extent, and so has a sufficient description. Each has a varying relatedness, or relationships. So each has an *exclusive* description. Characteristics are inter-dependent, and some determine others, or cause others. Hegel said that everything is determined by everything else. The universe is an organic unity, and the parts manifest the whole. There is an inner teleology. The parts are alive and in relation. So the whole is an organic or living unity, not a unity of composition, like a book of words. The universe is of living parts overlapping with "enormous complexity." But now a difficulty occurs, and it may be best represented by an example. Take a family of two brothers the parents being dead. The family is real, but it only now consists of two brothers. Each man has love to the other one, in some degree. But the idea of a family does not of itself give us reality, as it presupposes people but does not describe them. They might be father and son, or widow and sons, and so forth. We cannot reach reality except by overcoming such presuppositions and finding real persons who give us something sure, for they only have parts within parts to infinity. *Every substance, being unique, must have a sufficient description.* So groups of souls (say a family) and souls, and parts of souls (their perceptions) must have, each, a sufficient description. Now we can only realise that if the parts are *perceptions*, and if such are determined or influenced by other souls. A = a group, say a family. B and C = 2 sons, the only parts left of the family of A. These perceive (and love to some extent, therefore) one another, and so cause one another to feel such love: i.e. each has a part (or perception) determined by the other, corresponding to the other. Selves

and their parts are the sole reality. Selves are the realities that *determine* their parts of other selves (= *perceptions* of other souls, or of parts of souls, or of groups of souls). Perception is the only power by which we can get an infinite series of parts within parts to infinity viz. B perceives C, i.e. loves C in some degree. So C determines a part of B, viz. B's perception of a love to C. C educes that perception or love. C determines B in that part of B. B may love others also, or have a faint affection to others, and again complaisance to yet others: and all for C's sake. "Love me, love my dog" even! McTaggart works out these implications of love in detail. We get then B! C, B loves C. C *determines* that part or perception of B. B! B! C = B perceives that he, B, perceives C; and so on infinitely if we desire to pursue the perceptions of perceptions.

But McTaggart says no one really does pursue it down and down. Enough that we have found reality as souls, and their perceptive love to other souls.

McTaggart shows us that if we do not love we are not really ourselves. We may be clever animals, or rich citizens, but we have not found (i.e. felt) our eternal nature. We doom ourselves to a terrible awakening some day. "*Determining correspondence*" is thus a relation between souls, i.e. between a soul C, and part of another soul B. B! C = B perceives (and so loves) C, in some degree or sense of the term perception. C determines a part of B thus. No two souls are alike: each is unique, and so had a unique description.

The King of England 1500 A. D. = Henry VII, and no one else. Each soul has an infinity of parts, for no soul is simple, or a single fact.

But reality is souls, parts of souls, and groups of souls, or selves. If we take groups of souls we get no true infinity of parts, for there is no sufficient description possible of a group of souls. The group presupposes males or females, young or old souls in its group, and we need to go to the souls themselves to get a sufficient description. Nor can the parts of souls give us sufficient descriptions. They again presuppose various powers in the souls. We need, then, to fix our attention on *the unique souls of the universe*. They alone give us an infinite divisibility that is not a vicious infinite by endless presuppositions. Our souls have implications, viz., our per-

ceptions of one another, and their parts within parts to infinity. It is impossible to reach reality—substances with sufficient descriptions—by a category or description such as “family,” for it does not decide what the parts of it are: they may be husband and wife and child, or brother and sister, and so forth. It *presupposes* so many possibilities. We must get to a category which tells of something that is unique and self-contained, and from which the parts are implied *ad infinitum*.

The only category is a self. When we reach selves we have substances, spiritual substances whose parts are perceptions, and their parts are perceptions of these perceptions, and so on *ad infinitum*.

Hence reality is selves or souls, all eternal and related, and perceiving other souls, and loving in some degree whom they perceive: for there can be no real perception without some degree of sympathy or love.

The universe is such souls, in one or more primary wholes or groups of souls, and perhaps all in one such whole or gathering of inter-related souls of all stages, degrees, kinds, in some attitude of love, and its joy. The argument of McTaggart is of this nature. To recapitulate—substances are souls of all degrees, and their parts, which are perceptions. But such exist in and by their relatedness. If I see a stone, I see lowly souls or selves. All is alive, in some degree: and all is related to some other souls, and to their parts or perceptions. Now no substance (i.e. self) is simple. It is divisible, and divisible therefore infinitely, for its parts are divisible.

But groups of souls give us no infinite divisibility, for they have no definite relatedness to souls. So with parts of souls. They give us no starting-point for an infinite divisibility of parts. These (groups or parts) presuppose various souls below or above them, and they (the groups or parts) have no sufficient and unique description. Only souls can give us infinite divisibility. From them proceed parts, viz. perceptions, and they have parts, viz. perception of a perception, and so on down *ad inf*. They imply their parts within parts. Groups and parts of souls only presuppose a variety of parts, giving us a vicious infinite.

In volume II McTaggart deals with the probable rather than the necessary facts. He declares that *souls are not in time, that matter does not exist, and that love really unites souls, each to one or a few*

other souls. Love is not pity merely, resulting in almsgiving, as in some religions. It is real emotional love to a person or persons.

Hence such persons are eternal, for love is inexhaustible in its nature. Their perceptions are really grades of love to other souls, or to what are dreaming souls, as forms of so-called "matter."

We thus come to the many themes with which our author deals. *As to "matter,"* McTaggart says it is really souls or selves of a low order. It seems to have primary qualities (as size, shape, position, mobility and impenetrability, excluding other forms of "matter"), and secondary qualities (as colour, hardness, smell, taste and sound). The latter are effects produced by something on an observing object. "Matter" cannot exist, as it has no parts within parts to infinity. Even space is now said to be made up of "indivisible points of matter," and so does not exist. There can, then, be no "determining correspondence" as to matter, and so it does not exist. It has no perceptions of souls, and perceptions of those perceptions. *As to the idea of God,* McTaggart discussed it in *Some Dogmas of Religion*, and concluded there could be no Omnipotent God, and no non-Omnipotent God either. In Volume II of *The Nature of Existence*, we have a chapter on the subject. "No self can be part of another self." "Every primary part is a self." So there can be no All-inclusive self, as God. If God be one self among many selves, He would not be creative of selves. All selves must have come into existence together, or else be eternal. So there is no God, either Creative or Unitive. *As to time,* there is no A-series of past, present or future: and no B-series of earlier and later events: though we believe these to exist. But there is a C-series of expressions to us of eternal events: as we read a book in stages, which yet exists all the time and all at once. So we count 1 2 3 . . . or A B C . . . , whereas numbers and the alphabet exist all at once, and all the time.

History is of events which really and eternally interpenetrate: in a timeless order of souls, of love and their relations to one another. "We have come to the conclusion that there is no real A series and no real B series (before and after), and no real time-series." (p. 30.) Yet there is a real series, but it is not a time series. This is the real C series, felt by us in misperceptions, not entirely erroneous. The terms in it are really connected by *permanent* relations, like A, B, C. . . . our experiences of time occur in a

“specious present”; in what seems to be a “present,” as opposed to past and future. There is no such thing really. We have experiences which really are aspects of our external experience.

We misperceive the C-series (a reality) as if it were a B series of earlier and later facts of experience. The C-series actually exist, in eternity. *In regard to immortality*: McTaggart believed all souls to be eternal in an eternal present. The “C-series” is misconceived as if it were the B series of events before or after any given event. The C-series is not a time-series. It moves from less inclusive to more inclusive reality: and such a process is outside time.

“All that exists is really timeless. What seems future is present in some sense now.” “The system of the determining correspondence parts is the universe, since it contains all existing content.” “If heaven is timeless, it cannot be really future.”

“Selves, though not in time, appear as in time” (.372).

“The same is true of all parts of selves which are determined by determining correspondence: viz. the perceptions which each self contains of selves and of parts of selves to infinity.” “Nothing is really past, for nothing is an event in time.”

Thus, our ordinary events, as having a breakfast and writing a letter, are related to other events in our self-manifestation. In that series we are but partly expressing ourselves. We exist as a whole eternally but we partly express ourselves, and call that our “life” here, or a series of such lives, by reincarnations. We are more than we think we are.

What is the heart of every soul, then, but love? McTaggart discusses this in great detail, and with a very great insight. It is an astonishing piece of work to find, in a philosophical book, the power and enthusiasm of a soul of love, freely given to us.

“The entire life of each self centres round and depends on his love for other selves, and, as I believe, *it is love which is the supreme value of life . . .* Love has no end but itself” (II p. 392).

“I shall never permanently lose my friend or his love.”

“A self will love every other self whom he perceives directly.” In the future, beyond death, after our reincarnations here, love will be stronger and more joyous than here and now. Barriers will be swept aside. “Unity will be unhampered.” Uncongenial qualities will be largely overcome, in “absolute reality.” All perceptions of

other selves will be states of love. They ever are such states really, but we misperceive them here on earth. "Absolute reality is timeless and . . . infinite." (p. 160). Love here cannot keep permanently in its intensity. We are drawn aside by life's toil. But in the full life to come love will be free, unfettered, ecstatic even. By determining correspondence ($B!C = C$ influences or determines B, and so B perceives or loves C) one soul differentiates another. A chain of causation runs through the universe then.

There is, then, no space (no fixed lengths of miles) and no time (no fixed experiences of years), but *only souls in love with souls*; and thus kindly to all who are associated with the beloved sou's; and complaisant to all parts of the beloved soul or sou's.

And if the beloved one has faults, even these are tolerated, if not a cause of enhancing the love felt to that soul. For shadow can relieve and make brighter tints more beautiful. McTaggart endeavoured to show and *explain the evils of life*. He has treated "Evil" as error, vice, pain and disharmony. But what of loneliness, ennui, disappointment, over-work, a nagging wife or husband, poverty, fear of death, disease, physical weakness without pain, being hated or hating another?

In the last section of *The Nature of Existence*, our author wrote "There may await each of us, and perhaps each of us in many different lives, delusions, cries, suffering, hatred, as great as or greater than any which we now know. All that we can say is that this evil, however great it may be, is *only passing*. The final stage is one in which the good infinitely exceeds all the evil in the series by which it is attained. Of the nature of the good we know something. We know that it is a time'ess and endless state of love,—love so direct, so intimate, and so powerful that even the deepest mystic rapture gives us but the slightest foretaste of its perfection. We know that we shall know nothing but our beloved, and those they love, and ourselves as loving them, and that only in this shall we seek and find satisfaction. Between the present and that fruition there stretches a future which may well need courage. For, while there will be in it much good and increasing good, there may await us evils which we can now measure only by their infinite insignificance as compared with the final reward."

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