JOHN McTAGGART ELLIS McTAGGART

1866—1925

JOHN McTAGGART ELLIS McTAGGART was born in 1866, and educated at Clifton and Trinity College, Cambridge. In 1888 he was placed alone in the first class of the Moral Science Tripos. In 1890 he became President of the Union Society. He was elected to a prize-fellowship at Trinity in 1891. Soon after this he paid a long visit to New Zealand, where, in 1894, he married Miss Margaret Elizabeth Bird of Taranaki. In 1897 he was made College Lecturer in the Moral Sciences, an office which he held until 1923. He then retired, after completing his twenty-five years' service, apparently in perfect health and certainly at the height of his intellectual powers. He still continued to give some of his former courses of lectures, but his main philosophical work after his retirement was the preparation of the third draft of the second volume of his *Nature of Existence*. Besides these professional labours he gave valuable help to Trinity by his active membership of the committee which drew up the new college statutes rendered necessary by the changes which the Royal Commission had imposed on the university and the colleges.

In January 1925 McTaggart and his wife were taking a holiday in London. He was seeing many of his old friends, and was to all appearance in the best of health and spirits, when he was suddenly stricken down. After a short but painful illness, borne with admirable courage and patience, he died on 18th January, 1925, in a nursing home in London at the age of 58; passing, as he firmly believed, to the next stage in the long but finite journey from the illusion of time to the reality of eternal life. He must, it seems, have been suffering for some years from a weakness of the heart, unsuspected by himself or his friends. It was characteristic of

him that he left minute instructions for his funeral and for the disposition of his letters, papers, and manuscripts. In accordance with his wishes, his body was cremated; and, instead of the customary religious service, a favourite passage from Spinoza's *Ethics* was read by one of his oldest friends. This passage—*Homo liber de nulla re minus quam de morte cogitat; et eius sapientia non mortis, sed vitae meditatio est*—is engraved on his memorial brass in the ante-chapel of Trinity, which has been fitly placed beside those of his teachers, Sidgwick and Ward. On this brass is an admirable Latin inscription, composed by an old friend who is an eminent classical scholar. At McTaggart's request no specifically Christian symbol or sentiment appears.

McTaggart's life was spent in the service of philosophy, and it is fitting to begin with an account of his philosophical works. While he lived he published the following books: *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology*, *Some Dogmas of Religion*, *A Commentary to Hegel's Logic*, and the first volume of *The Nature of Existence*. At the time of his death he had completed the second draft of the remaining volume of *The Nature of Existence* and was engaged in writing the third draft. This volume has been published recently; from the third draft, so far as that goes, and thenceforward from the second.

McTaggart was an extremely careful and conscientious writer and thinker. All his published works had been completely rewritten several times before being sent to the press, and the earlier drafts were submitted to his friends for criticism in respect of logical rigour and literary form. It might have been feared that so much elaboration would lead to a heavy and lifeless production. This is certainly not so with McTaggart, who must plainly be ranked with Hobbes, Berkeley, and Hume among the masters of English philosophical prose. His style is pellucidly clear, yet he never ignores a qualification or over-simplifies a subject for the sake of literary elegance. When he asserts a proposition he generally foresees, emphasizes, and tries to answer

the objections which can reasonably be made to it. In this respect he resembles Sidgwick. But Sidgwick's writing, though always clear and dignified, is somewhat heavy; the reader of his works is always enlightened, often elevated, seldom excited, and never amused. There are, e.g., few abler or more conspicuously honest books than Sidgwick's *Methods of Ethics*; yet, after several careful readings of it, one is ashamed to find how little one has remembered of the details. McTaggart, though he never strained after humour or strewed his writings with epigrams, achieved both often enough to lighten the burden of a difficult argument, to fix a doctrine in the reader's mind by an apt illustration, and to deflate a pretentious fallacy by a pointed thrust. The abstractness and complexity of the subjects with which he dealt, and the thoroughness with which he treated them, prevent his books from being easy reading. But, unlike his master Hegel and too many of Hegel's followers, he never added to the intrinsic difficulties of a subject by confused thinking or cloudy metaphorical writing. To McTaggart Hegel played the part of the drunken Helot, whose awful literary example helped to preserve and refine the crystalline clearness of his own style. At times McTaggart's writing rises to heights of intense emotion and great beauty, which are all the more impressive from their rarity and their restraint.

McTaggart's publications fall into three quite distinct, but closely connected groups. The first consists of his three books about Hegelianism. The second contains one work only, viz., *Some Dogmas of Religion*. This is the only book which McTaggart wrote for the educated amateur, as distinct from the trained philosophical specialist. The third comprises the two volumes on the *Nature of Existence*, in which he expounds his own system of constructive metaphysics by his own methods. Something will now be said about each of these three groups in turn.

McTaggart's character combined, as will appear in more detail later in this sketch, many apparently inconsistent

features. Perhaps there is nothing at first sight more paradoxical about him than the fact that so much of his life should have been devoted to the study and exposition of Hegel's philosophy. If the style be the man, no two men could have had less in common than Hegel, with his vile technical jargon and his constant abuse of metaphor and verbal ambiguity, and McTaggart, with his short, clear, direct sentences, and his lawyer-like determination to make every clause completely 'water-tight'. If Hegel be the inspired, and too often incoherent, prophet of the Absolute; and if Bradley be its chivalrous knight, ready to challenge any one who dares to question its pre-eminence; McTaggart is its devoted and extremely astute family solicitor.

Moreover, Hegel was unlike McTaggart in his merits as well as in his defects. Hegel's strongest point is the comprehensive and intimate acquaintance with science, mathematics, history, law, art, social institutions, and religion, which forms the background of his writings. This gives them a solidity which is impressive even to readers who detest his style and can see nothing but verbal jugglery in his arguments. Such a background is lacking in McTaggart's works. It is of course obvious that he has a wide knowledge and a discriminating appreciation of English literature, and that he felt the interest of a cultured amateur in certain small sections of English history. But he knew little or nothing of science or mathematics and no more of the classics than he had acquired with pain and disgust at Clifton, whilst he viewed the claims of history to be a serious subject with an amused contempt which some of his colleagues found hard to bear.

Again, McTaggart, in theory at least, was a strong individualist. According to him, social institutions are simply means to the welfare of their members; church and state and family are no more to be regarded as ends than the drainage system or the underground railways. Nothing could be less like Hegel's view. It may, however, fairly be doubted whether the intense emotions of loyalty and

patriotism which McTaggart felt towards certain societies, e.g., towards Clifton, Trinity, and England, could possibly have been justified on his own theory, or could have existed unless he had unwittingly thought, felt, and acted in accordance with a view not very different from Hegel's. Closely connected with the difference of emphasis which has just been mentioned is another difference, of profound importance, which was recognized by McTaggart. It is plain that McTaggart's two fundamental convictions were that man is immortal, and that the love of one man for another is of infinite value and profound metaphysical significance. Now he admits that Hegel took so little interest in immortality as hardly to mention it in the course of his voluminous writings. And he admits that there is only one passage, viz., in the account of the *Kingdom of the Holy Ghost* in the *Philosophy of Religion*, in which Hegel seems to ascribe any deep metaphysical importance to love; and, even then, it is doubtful whether he means by 'love' what McTaggart meant by it.

Nor do the differences between the two philosophers end even here. Hegel often makes it an objection to other forms of philosophy that they move at the level of Understanding; e.g., that they enunciate a number of alternatives, which are assumed to be severally self-contained, mutually exclusive, and collectively exhaustive, and that they then proceed to knock down all but one of these and to embrace the sole survivor. As against this he holds that philosophy should use Reason, which shows how a number of alternatives that seem to be exclusive and self-subsistent are really but so many different aspects of a single more concrete category. Now, although McTaggart, in discussing Hegel's method, accepts this doctrine, it must be confessed that he paid but little heed to it in his own philosophizing. He is rather conspicuously a devotee of the method of the Understanding, with its characteristic merits and defects; and, if he has a fault, it is a tendency to withdraw his eye from the facts themselves, and to indulge in extremely clever forensic

'logic-chopping' with verbal expression and uncriticized categories.

Had McTaggart anything in common with Hegel? In temperament they shared one fundamental characteristic. Each consisted of a mystic, kept in perfect control by a sound common-sense citizen of great practical ability who loved order and decency and hated sentimentality and high-flown nonsense of every kind. It is safe to say that McTaggart would have disliked the German romantics of Hegel's time as much as Hegel himself did, and that Hegel would have shared McTaggart's contempt for teetotallers, Nonconformists, pacificists, Irish and Indian Nationalists, and the Labour Party. Now a kind of sentimental and muddle-headed admiration for 'rebels' and 'rebellion', as such, was common form among the comfortably placed bourgeois intellectuals who formed the societies in which Hegel and McTaggart lived. It is natural that both men should have reacted against it. And it is natural that both should often have carried the outward expression of this reaction to extremes which they might have found it hard to justify. Beyond this resemblance the master and the disciple seem to have almost nothing in common except the conviction that the universe is at bottom a spiritual system, and that human reason is competent to discover and prove many important and paradoxical conclusions about it without the aid of special empirical investigation.

Suppose the following problem in psychology had been propounded: 'Take an eighteenth-century English Whig. Let him be a mystic. Endow him with the logical subtlety of the great schoolmen and their belief in the powers of human reason, with the business capacity of a successful lawyer, and with the lucidity of the best type of French mathematician. Inspire him (Heaven knows how) in early youth with a passion for Hegel. Then subject him to the teaching of Sidgwick and the continual influence of Moore and Russell. Set him to expound Hegel. What will be the result?' Hegel himself could not have answered this ques-

tion *a priori*, but the course of world-history has solved it *ambulando* by producing McTaggart. It is natural then that McTaggart's interpretation of Hegel should differ greatly from that of other commentators, and that it should often be hard to believe that Hegel had ever imagined, or would have accepted, the doctrines which McTaggart ascribed to him. If McTaggart be challenged on any particular detail he can generally quote one or more almost unintelligible sentences from Hegel, and can triumphantly show that they are capable of bearing the surprising and ingenious interpretation which he has put upon them. And, against critics or rival interpreters of Hegel, he can generally quote passages which are immune to their criticisms and inconsistent with their interpretations. And yet, if McTaggart's account of Hegelianism be taken as a whole and compared with Hegel's writings as a whole, the impression produced is one of profound unlikeness. 'Whatever Hegel may have meant', the reader says to himself, 'it surely cannot have been this.' 'And', he hastens to add, 'it was probably nothing nearly so sensible or plausible as this.' If we compare McTaggart with the other commentators on Hegel we must admit that he has at least produced an extremely lively and fascinating rabbit from the Hegelian hat, whilst they have produced nothing but consumptive and gibbering chimeras. And we shall admire his resource and dexterity all the more when we reflect that the rabbit was, in all probability, never inside the hat, whilst the chimeras perhaps were.

McTaggart's first book, *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, is an enlargement of the dissertation on which he was awarded his fellowship at Trinity. In it he tries to explain, and to defend against critics, the Dialectical Method, as used in passing from category to category within the *Logic*, and also the transition from the *Logic* as a whole, through *Nature*, to *Spirit*. His account of the Dialectical Method within the *Logic* is, in essence, the following. There is one and only one complete and self-subsisting category, viz., that which Hegel calls the *Absolute Idea*. All other

categories are partial factors in the Absolute Idea. Every rational being has an implicit knowledge of the Absolute Idea; but no human being starts with an explicit knowledge of it, or reaches such knowledge except by the Dialectical Method. If any category, other than the Absolute Idea, be supposed to express adequately the formal nature of Reality, our implicit knowledge of the Absolute Idea forces a certain complementary and opposed aspect of Reality on our attention. On further reflection a more concrete category is presented to our notice, in which these two complementary and opposed aspects are seen to be combined and reconciled with each other. We now try to regard this new category as adequately expressing the formal nature of Reality. The same process takes place as before. Thus we work gradually upward; our still implicit knowledge of the Absolute Idea reacting at every step with the knowledge of it which has so far been made explicit, until at last all our knowledge of it is dragged into the light of clear consciousness.

McTaggart pointed out in this book that the nature of the relations between the successive categories gradually changes as we pass from those of *Being* to those of the *Notion*. The opposition between thesis and antithesis, which is very marked at the beginning of the *Logic*, becomes less and less intense as the series nears the Absolute Idea. In the categories of *Being* the difficulty is to see how thesis can lead to antithesis and how the two can ever be reconciled; in those of the *Notion* the difficulty is to see that there is any real opposition between thesis and antithesis or distinction between antithesis and synthesis.

In defending Hegel's method against its critics McTaggart had to deal with three main objections, viz., (i) that, within the *Logic*, the transitions from category to category are made possible only by the surreptitious use of empirical knowledge; (ii) that, in the transition from *Logic* to *Nature* and *Spirit*, Hegel made an unjustifiable leap from essence to existence; and (iii) that, throughout his

system, Hegel constantly claimed to deduce concrete empirical details in physics, psychology, and politics by pure thought from *a priori* premisses. McTaggart's answer to the first objection is his theory of the Dialectical Method, outlined above. His answer to the second is that Hegel did in fact use an existential premiss, but that it is so obvious that he never explicitly stated it. The existential premiss is: 'Something exists' or 'There is something'. If this be granted—and no one can consistently reject it—it is granted that Hegel's category of Being has application. If the validity of the arguments in the *Logic* be admitted it then follows that the category of the Absolute Idea must have application. And it is evident, from the nature of the Absolute Idea and of the categories which immediately precede it, that, if it applies to anything, it applies to the universe as a single collective whole.

McTaggart meets the third line of attack by denying the allegation, and explaining how Hegel laid himself open to this misunderstanding even by friendly and intelligent critics. The celebrated transition from Logic to Nature, as interpreted by McTaggart, like the Beatitudes, as interpreted by the late Dr. Rashdall, proves to be a mere storm in a teacup which need disturb nobody. It may be stated as follows: 'We know *a priori* that anything that exists must have some characteristics which cannot be known *a priori*, and that these must be consistent with those characteristics which can be known *a priori*.' Or, to put it in a different but equivalent way: 'Everything must be characterized by the categories, but nothing can be characterized *merely* by the categories.' The reasons why this innocent proposition was so much misunderstood and why so much needless scandal arose were the following. In the first place, Hegel, having to find names for some hundreds of categories, called some of them after certain concrete processes, such as *Mechanism*, *Chemism*, *Life*, &c., which, he thought, approximately illustrated these categories. His readers were then liable to think that he was

claiming to deduce concrete empirical facts. Moreover, by this practice he unfortunately confused himself besides raising false hopes in his readers. For he often went on to make subdivisions and to indulge in elaborate discussions about points of detail, which were suggested to him by the associations of the name that he had given to a category and were neither entailed by the earlier stages of the *Logic* nor relevant to its later stages. In fact, as my Lord Chesterfield said of the Garter King-at-Arms, 'the foolish fellow didn't know even his own foolish business'. These explanations apply mainly within the *Logic*. Within *Nature* and *Spirit*, on McTaggart's view, Hegel never pretended that the various subdivisions, or the transitions from one subdivision to another, were discoverable or justifiable *a priori* by pure thought.

Assuming that McTaggart's explanation, qualifications, and admissions suffice to remove antecedent objections to the very *possibility* of Hegelianism, the question still remains whether *in fact* Hegel succeeded in passing dialectically from Pure Being to the Absolute Idea. This can be answered only by a detailed investigation into the *Logic* category by category. This McTaggart undertook in his *Commentary to Hegel's Logic*, a work of amazing patience and ingenuity for which all English students of Hegel are deeply indebted to him. The conclusions which he reached may be summed up as follows. Many of the transitions are valid, but several are invalid. Not only are there isolated failures; there are whole sets of categories such that the transitions into, within, and out of the set must be rejected. In the case of isolated failures, McTaggart often suggested an alternative of his own, which he thought would be valid and adequate; in the other cases he did not attempt this. But he records his conviction that Hegel's final result comes nearer to the truth than any other philosopher has reached, and that it could almost certainly be proved from Hegel's starting-point by the Dialectical Method, provided that suitable modifications were made at certain crucial points. The admitted

break-down of Hegel's argument at certain points seemed the less serious to McTaggart because he had come to the conclusion, which he admits that Hegel had never contemplated and would probably have rejected, that there might be a number of alternative and equally valid dialectical paths from one category to another.

Studies in Hegelian Cosmology, which was published between the two works which have now been considered, is a series of essays in applied Hegelianism. To the general reader it is far the most entertaining of McTaggart's books on Hegel. Most of Hegel's English followers were interested mainly in his philosophical conclusions and his applications of them to politics, ethics, and religion. These they considered true and important, whilst they abandoned, with a smile or a sigh, the Dialectical Method by which he had claimed to establish his conclusions. McTaggart used to call this 'Hegelianism with the proofs left out'. And, for his part, he took exactly the opposite view of Hegel's achievements. He thought that the Dialectical Method and the purely metaphysical results of it were valid and important, whilst he regarded all the concrete applications which had been made of Hegelianism as unjustified and most of them as positively false. Most of the essays in the *Hegelian Cosmology* fall into two classes, viz., those in which McTaggart tries to show that Hegelianism supports the doctrines that he wished to believe, and those in which he tries to show that it does not support the doctrines which other Hegelians wished to believe. In the positive part of the book McTaggart argued that, whatever Hegel himself may have held, his general principles, when fully worked out, imply that the Absolute is not a person but a perfect society of perfect and eternal persons each of whom is in love with one or more of the rest. Moreover, it is probable that each human mind, as it really is, is identical with one of these persons. If so, each of us in reality is eternal, and, *sub specie temporis*, our eternity will probably appear as persistence throughout the whole of time.

In reading the negative part of the book it is worth while to remember that the school of English Hegelianism which flourished during the latter part of the nineteenth century had, as a whole, certain characteristics which filled McTaggart, and would probably have filled Hegel, with an amused annoyance that was quite compatible with genuine respect for and friendship with many of its members. With a very few exceptions, of whom far the most notable was Bradley, it was (if we may say so with becoming submission) a paradise of pompous prigs. 'The sort of people', McTaggart would say, 'who wanted to believe that they ate a good dinner only in order to strengthen themselves to appreciate Dante.' The destructive part of *Hegelian Cosmology* is certainly written with this school and its special foibles in view; and, if a naughty desire to shock Bosanquet never led McTaggart to assert what he did not believe, it almost certainly did influence his choice of subjects, of examples, and of expressions. Thus McTaggart maintains that the state is a means and not an end; that the fact that the Kingdom of Heaven is a perfect society of intimately related persons gives us no guidance whatever in politics or ethics here and now; and that, although neither ethical nor psychological hedonism is true, the hedonic calculus is an adequate guide to conduct and is the only one available to us. He also stresses every passage in which Hegel minimizes the importance of sin and treats it as a necessary stage in the advance from innocence to virtue. It was indeed his considered opinion that boys and undergraduates should be given ample opportunities to sin and be punished for it. There was no short cut to virtue, and the sins that they were tempted to commit, unlike those of older men, were seldom socially dangerous. Provided they were punished—and this was of course essential—society could afford to treat them as salutary and slightly amusing episodes like mumps or measles. It was in this connexion that McTaggart once formulated the principle that 'every undergraduate should be compelled to satisfy his tutor that

he had been drunk at least once a year as a guarantee of good faith that he was not a teetotaller'.

The book ends with a very interesting expository essay in which McTaggart discusses the relations of Hegelianism to Christianity. He points out that, in spite of certain superficial likenesses, the differences are fundamental. And he concludes that, whilst Hegelianism is a most useful ally of Christianity against popular materialism and against Deism or Unitarianism, it is in the end the most dangerous rival that Christianity has ever had. For Hegelianism contains in a purified form, without mythology and without compromising historical associations, all that is true in the highest religion. The Hegelian comprehends, appreciates, and assigns its true place to Christianity among the manifestations of the human spirit, and, in so doing, sees through it and passes beyond it.

This essay forms a natural transition from McTaggart's books about Hegelianism to his *Dogmas of Religion.* It is strange that this work failed to secure a high degree of popular success. It presupposes no knowledge of philosophy ; it is written with admirable clarity and abounds with wit ; and it deals with problems which have interested almost all intelligent men in all ages. It opens with an attempt to prove that dogmas, i. e., metaphysical propositions about the universe, are essential to religion ; and that they can be satisfactorily established only by metaphysical reasoning. Probably the most important chapter in it is that on *Human Immortality and Pre-existence.* McTaggart had this reprinted separately ; and, during the war of 1914 to 1918, he sent copies of it to some who had lost friends and relations, in the hope that it might help them in their bereavement. Here he does not attempt to *prove* human survival of bodily death. He held that positive arguments for immortality must come from metaphysics ; and he claimed to supply such a proof, on Hegelian lines in the *Cosmology,* and in another and quite original way in the *Nature of Existence.* He took little interest in Psychical

Research; holding that, even if the alleged results were certain and were incapable of a normal explanation, they would still be susceptible of so many alternative supernormal explanations as to add very little force to the probability of survival and none at all to that of immortality. What McTaggart claims to show here is simply that the antecedent objections to human survival, drawn from common sense and natural science, are quite baseless. In this connexion he takes an extremely Berkeleian view of matter, going so far as to say that the independent existence of matter is 'a bare possibility to which it would be foolish to attach the slightest importance'. It follows from McTaggart's arguments in his other works that the existence of each of us, *sub specie temporis*, will occupy the whole of time. He held it to be most likely that this existence will be split up into a series of many successive lives, each beginning with a birth and ending with a death. Here he takes this as an hypothesis; defends it against the more obvious difficulties; and claims that it would explain many well-known facts, such as love at first sight, and some men's innate capacity for activities which others acquire, if at all, late in life and with great pains. He tries to show that loss of memory of our previous lives would not make this kind of survival worthless, and would be, in some respects, a positive advantage.

The remaining chapters in the book deal with more hackneyed subjects, such as Determination and Divine Omnipotence. Though always acute, and often extremely entertaining, they do not show McTaggart at his best, for the subjects tempt him to indulge a taste for setting up and knocking down men of straw, which he shared with most highly skilled dialecticians. E.g., omnipotence is taken to include the power of doing what is *logically*, and not merely what is *causally* impossible; and free will is taken to mean indeterminism in its extremest form. No theologian of repute accepts omnipotence in this sense, and no philosopher or moralist of repute accepts free will

in this sense. And the elaborate sapping and mining of these two lath-and-plaster fortresses by all the engines in McTaggart's dialectical armoury begins by being amusing but soon becomes wearisome. McTaggart ends by rejecting the notions of an omnipotent God, and of a creative but non-omnipotent God ; but he allows the bare possibility of a non-omnipotent non-creative God. 'The only reason against the existence of such a being is that there is no reason for it.' McTaggart's atheism becomes still more definite in the *Nature of Existence*, where he shows that the structure of reality, as determined by him, is incompatible with the existence of either a creative or a controlling self, though it is compatible with the existence of a self which *appears* to control the rest of the universe.

There can be no doubt that McTaggart's greatest achievement is his last book, *The Nature of Existence*. It is the less necessary to give a detailed account of it as McTaggart himself has given an admirable synopsis in his contribution to *Contemporary British Philosophy*, vol. i. The work forms a complete deductive system of *a priori* metaphysics on the grand scale, and may quite fairly be compared with the *Enneads* of Plotinus, the *Ethics* of Spinoza, and the *Encyclopaedia* of Hegel. In English philosophical literature it occupies a unique position. One other Englishman, Professor Alexander, has indeed thought out and written down a highly comprehensive and original theory of the universe; but the distinguished author of *Space, Time, and Deity* would not count his work, nor wish it to be counted, as a deductive system with the smallest possible number of empirical premisses.

McTaggart at one time had meant to write a new dialectic, and the original title of the book was *The Dialectic of Existence*. But, although he continued to hold that the dialectical method of argument is valid, he wisely decided in the end to use straightforward deduction in building up his own system. It will be worth while to indicate the logical peculiarities of McTaggart's general method, and

the degree of certainty which he attached to his various conclusions. The premisses of the first volume fall into three classes; viz., (i) axioms, i.e., propositions which are, and can be seen to be, intrinsically necessary; (ii) contingent propositions which are rendered completely certain by perception; and (iii) a peculiar class of propositions, the description of which may be deferred for the moment. Only two premisses of the second class are used, viz., that something exists, and that there is more than one substance. And the latter of these is not really needed, for it is entailed by the former together with one of the axioms. The argument now proceeds, using only premisses of the first two classes, and therefore reaching conclusions which are absolutely certain if no mistake has been made, until it reaches the crucial point of the whole system. The crucial point is the following. McTaggart regards it as self-evident that every substance must consist of parts which are themselves substances. Now this axiom, when combined with certain propositions about substance which he has deduced from other axioms, threatens to lead to a complete contradiction. The deadlock can be avoided on one and only one condition. The proposition which asserts that this condition is fulfilled must therefore be accepted, though it is neither a self-evidently necessary proposition nor a contingent proposition which is guaranteed by perception. It is called the *Principle of Determining Correspondence*, and it is the only member of the third class of premisses. The remaining conclusions of the first volume are certain, provided that no mistake has been made, except for the possibility that the Principle of Determining Correspondence may not be the only way of avoiding the conflict between the axiom of endless divisibility of substance and the deductions from the other axioms.

In the second volume the world as it appears to us here and now is viewed in the light of the conclusions of the first volume. The results are partly negative and partly positive. The negative conclusions are certain, for any apparent

feature of the existent which would be incompatible with its nature, as determined in Volume I, must necessarily be delusive. Tried by these tests the characteristics of being spatial, being material, being a sensum, being a judgement, being a supposition, and many other apparent characteristics physical and psychical, are found wanting and are rejected as delusive. The delusiveness of temporal characteristics is supposed to be established independently by an argument of great ingenuity which McTaggart had published some years before in *Mind*. It will be seen that the negative aspects of McTaggart's system are much more startling than those of most idealists. On his view, not only do we radically misperceive all that we perceive by our senses, we also radically misperceive ourselves and our mental processes when we interpret. Nevertheless, McTaggart holds, and tries to prove, that, although introspection is thus largely misleading, it is an act of direct acquaintance with *oneself* and not merely with certain mental events or processes which belong to oneself.

The positive results of the second volume are admittedly only probable, though McTaggart thinks that their probability is very high indeed. The general line of argument is as follows. It has been proved in Volume I that the universe must consist of a certain set of substances called *Primary Parts*, each of which is divisible into parts within parts without end. These must be interrelated in certain complicated ways in order to answer the requirements of the Principle of Determining Correspondence. Does our everyday experience present us with any things that might reasonably be identified with these Primary Parts? McTaggart's answer is that the required conditions could be fulfilled if each Primary Part were a mind whose whole content was its perceptions of itself, of certain other minds, of its own perceptions, and of their perceptions.

In addition it must be assumed that a perception of any part of a whole is *ipso facto* a part of a perception of that whole. A system composed of such minds would fulfil the

necessary conditions, and we cannot imagine any other kind of system that would fulfil them. Now it must be admitted that our minds, as they appear to us in introspection, do not appear to have all these characteristics, and do appear to have some which are incompatible with these. But we already know that introspection must largely misrepresent the nature of our minds and their processes to us. So it is quite likely that each human mind, as it really is, is one of the Primary Parts of the universe. It is from this that McTaggart infers that each human mind is really eternal, and must appear, *sub specie temporis*, as persisting throughout the whole of time. And it is from the intimate cognitive relations which must subsist between the Primary Parts of the universe, if these be minds, that he infers that every mind, as it really is, must be in love with one or more others to a degree which we can at present only dimly imagine.

Love, according to McTaggart, is the fundamental emotion; and by 'love' he means, not philanthropy or benevolence, but that passionate personal affection which none of us in this life can feel towards more than a very few persons. No philosopher but Plato has treated love so seriously, has analysed it so carefully, or has written about it so eloquently as McTaggart. Yet there is a profound difference between the two philosophers on this point. For Plato the love of a man for his friend is only a stepping-stone by which the soul rises to the contemplation and love of the Idea of the Good. For McTaggart it is the one supremely valuable thing in the universe; it cannot be a step towards something higher, for there is nothing above it.

Now, when McTaggart seeks to combine the positive and the negative parts of his doctrine, he is brought face to face with the ghost which haunts every system of Absolute Idealism. This is the seemingly hopeless conflict between the error which must exist if the negative results be accepted and the perfection which must exist if the positive results be accepted. Perhaps the finest part of the whole work is

the transparent honesty with which McTaggart states and emphasizes this problem, and the heroic effort which he makes to solve it in detail. Hegel brushes it aside with the magnificent epigram: '*Die Vollführung des unendlichen Zwecks ist so nur die Täuschung aufzuheben als ob er noch nicht vollführt sei*'; McTaggart accepted the spirit of this epigram and tried to show how it could be realized without contradiction. It is impossible here to do more than mention that, on McTaggart's view, all other misperception is bound up with the misperception of the world as being in time. His solution, if valid, would provide an answer to the two fundamental problems which all other systems of Absolute Idealism have shirked: 'How can a timeless and changeless reality appear to endure and to change?' and 'How can the perfect parts of a perfect whole misperceive it and themselves as imperfect?'

The reputation of books and their writers with posterity depends on so many unforeseeable conditions that no prudent person will risk a prophecy on such a subject. Deductive systems of speculative philosophy are at present out of fashion, and it may be that the human intellect has been so disheartened by past failures and is now so preoccupied with the methods and results of the natural sciences that it will never again take much interest in attempts to solve the riddles of the universe by deductive reasoning from *a priori* premisses. But this at least may be said. The system expounded in the *Nature of Existence* is equal in scope and originality to any of the great historical systems of European philosophy, whilst in clearness of statement and cogency of argument it far surpasses them all. If subtle analysis, rigid reasoning, and constructive fertility, applied with tireless patience to the hardest and deepest problems of metaphysics, and expressed in language which always enlightens the intellect and sometimes touches the emotions, be a title to philosophical immortality, then McTaggart has fully earned his place among the immortals by his *Nature of Existence*.

It remains to say something of McTaggart as a teacher and as a man. His teaching work in Trinity consisted mainly of lecturing. It has happily never been the custom of Cambridge to exhaust and sterilize its dons by sacrificing the best part of their lives to the drudgery of hearing and criticizing undergraduates' essays, and in McTaggart's time the duties of a college lecturer included even less of such work than they do at present. McTaggart was an admirable lecturer; he loved the work, and he gave many courses. His normal stint consisted of three courses of lectures for the Tripos, each of which went on throughout the three terms of the academic year. Each course consisted of two hours a week of actual lecturing, and a third hour of discussion. In addition he usually gave an advanced course of an hour a week, called *Problems of Philosophy*. In this he would generally take some important philosophical book that had lately appeared and would discuss it with the class. Moreover, for many years he gave a course of introductory lectures, one on each Friday evening of term, to members of the university and of the women's colleges who were not studying philosophy. It is a grave defect in the curriculum of Cambridge that the study of philosophy is confined to a few specialists, and that the vast majority of undergraduates go through their whole university career without suspecting the existence of such a subject. McTaggart's popular lectures were meant to do something towards meeting this defect. They were brilliantly successful, and it is quite certain that they implanted in a fair proportion of his listeners a lifelong interest in philosophy. So fond was McTaggart of lecturing that, even after he retired, he continued, by agreement with his successor, to deliver his courses on the *General History of Modern Philosophy* and the *Problems of Philosophy* as well as the popular lectures.

McTaggart was a highly peripatetic philosopher, and must have walked many miles in his lecture-room whilst conducting his pupils from Descartes to Hegel and from

Pure Being to the Absolute Idea. The smaller lecture-rooms at Trinity, now gay with green paint and brightened by the portraits of eminent Victorians which the fastidious taste of a later age has rejected from Hall, resembled in McTaggart's time the more neglected kind of family vault. Here he lectured to small but select classes, consuming at each lecture in successive sips a tumbler of cold water provided by the college. At intervals a representative of the College Office, known as a 'marker', would appear for a moment silently and suddenly at the door, armed with a list, and, after looking severely round at the audience and the lecturer, would as suddenly and silently vanish. It was never known what he suspected, or whether his suspicions were confirmed or allayed. These gloomy and even sinister surroundings were enlivened by McTaggart's verbal wit and the happy oddity of his illustrations. Phoenixes, dragons, griffins, rocs, and unicorns, indeed most of the fauna of heraldry and mythology, formed the staple subjects of his examples, and were imagined in situations in which one would have been greatly surprised to meet them.

McTaggart was better as a formal lecturer than as the conductor of a conversation-class, and he was better in lecturing on metaphysics than on the history of philosophy. In a conversation-class he was too apt to confute a questioner with a few pungent phrases and there leave the matter, instead of trying to draw him out and discover what, if anything, lay behind his question. Thus the conversation-classes were liable to dwindle into an uncomfortable silence after the first twenty minutes or so. Much the same criticism must be made on McTaggart's treatment of the great historical thinkers up to Hegel. Their fallacies and confusions were remorselessly exposed, as by an extremely able public prosecutor, and they left the witness-box with their reputations apparently ruined for ever. Yet the audience was left with the impression that they had hardly had a fair run for their money, and that, if they had

been lucky enough to secure McTaggart as counsel for the defence, they might at worst have been dismissed with a caution. This impression was confirmed by the very different fate which befell Hegel when his turn came. In his case McTaggart lavished incredible patience and ingenuity to find a sensible meaning for the seemingly unintelligible and a plausible reconciliation for the seemingly inconsistent.

Though these were real defects, the undergraduates who attended McTaggart's lectures or wrote essays for him could not fail to be interested, instructed, and immensely impressed. Perhaps McTaggart never made a disciple, and certainly he never tried to. But on those undergraduates who worked with him he exercised the powerful formative influence of good example, the only kind of influence which can be exerted without impertinence and accepted without indignity. They learnt from a master of rigid reasoning and lucid writing how difficult it is to avoid, and how important it is to detect, logical fallacies and verbal ambiguities. They learnt how hard it is to *prove* or to *disprove* anything, by seeing that most of the arguments by which great philosophers have claimed to establish or refute propositions in fact do little more than slightly to raise or slightly to lower their probabilities. Insensibly their intellectual standards were exalted and refined, until slovenly thinking and loose rhetorical writing in themselves or in others began to evoke the same reaction of disgust as dirty finger-nails or bad table-manners or a Cockney accent. It must be added that the tendency to 'score off' a questioner, which was liable to manifest itself in the publicity of a conversation-class, was completely in abeyance when McTaggart dealt individually with his pupils in the privacy of his own rooms. Under the latter conditions, not only they, but many strangers who had no claim on his time or attention except an interest in the problems of philosophy, found him sympathetic, helpful, and wonderfully patient.

McTaggart's character was original and very strongly marked. Perhaps his fundamental emotions were loyalty

to his friends and devotion to certain societies of which he was a member. He could forgive any fault in a beloved individual except lukewarmness or opposition to the purposes of a beloved society. This made the war of 1914 to 1918 a particularly tragic event in McTaggart's life. He was passionately patriotic; and he fully accepted at the time, and continued to accept to the day of his death, the view that the Allies were wholly right and the Central Powers wholly wrong. To some of his most intimate friends this view seemed both antecedently incredible and in conflict with known facts; and they felt just as passionately that it was their duty, at a time when calm reason seemed likely to succumb to blind passion, to incur unpopularity by publicly stating and reiterating the other side of the case. Feelings were too deeply moved for either side to display that tact and forbearance which both would have shown under happier circumstances. The clash that ensued was a true tragedy in Hegel's sense, 'a conflict of right with right'; and, in it, wounds were given and received which, in some cases, never healed. It would be impertinent to pursue this matter farther; but this at least may be said. McTaggart's love of England was no arm-chair patriotism. Any one who knew him must acknowledge that he would willingly have died for his country; and he served it during the war in such ways as were open to a man of his age and physique, up to and beyond the limit of his powers.

The three societies to which McTaggart felt the strongest emotions of loyalty were Clifton, Trinity, and England. It would not be unfair to say that he regarded the Absolute as the heavenly pattern of which these were the least imperfect earthly copies. It was never his lot to take any public part in the affairs of England, but he was an assiduous and valuable member of the governing body of Clifton, and he played an active role on the College Council of Trinity. The popular conception of a philosopher as a child in practical affairs has never gained much support from the facts of real life; the examples of Mill, Hume, Locke,

Leibniz, and Plato are enough to refute it, and to them McTaggart must certainly be added. He was an admirable man of business, cool, cautious, and methodical, both in his own affairs and in those of the societies of which he was a member. Any one who had to make a difficult practical decision, and needed advice, could hardly do better than to state his case to McTaggart and be guided by him.

McTaggart combined a number of opinions which, though logically consistent with each other, are seldom held by the same person. In the case of most of his contemporaries at Cambridge a knowledge of a small number of their principles or prejudices enabled one to infer all the rest with a fair degree of certainty. This was far from being so with McTaggart, who unwittingly exemplified Bergsonian principles by performing actions and expressing opinions which were incalculable before the event but rationally explicable after it. He added greatly to the gaiety of college meetings; for he was always liable either to use arguments which every one accepted to support conclusions which no one else had thought of, or to support conclusions that every one accepted by arguments which had occurred to no one else.

As an illustration of an unusual combination of opinions one may mention the fact that he was an atheist, a firm believer in immortality, and a strong supporter of the Church of England against both popish and protestant dissent. Most of his views on church and state are explicable by the fact that he was in the main an admirable example of that most admirable, but now unhappily rare thing, an Erastian Whig. His defence of church establishment was stated in his early years in a famous speech at the Union, which caused acute embarrassment to most of its supporters; and this remained his view up to the end. An established church is desirable for two reasons. In the first place, it makes for freedom of thought *within* the church, for the limits of permissible theological divergence are ultimately settled by lay lawyers on purely secular grounds.

And, secondly, it makes for freedom *outside* the church, for the jealousy which dissenting Christians feel towards the Establishment prevents them from uniting with it to persecute non-Christian opinions. McTaggart supported this deductive conclusion by examples drawn from the United States and the Colonies.

His Whiggism was shown again in his extreme constitutionalism. Antecedently it might have been supposed that he would have sympathized with the Fascist revolution in Italy. But actually he held that Fascism and Bolshevism are two sides of the same medal (a medal which, it would have been unkind to remind him, was struck by Hegel) and that he could not consistently bless the former whilst cursing, as he very heartily did, the latter. Again, he was an extremely strong free-trader; and this both caused him to vote Liberal in 1906 and enabled him to avoid doing so in 1910. For, soon after the Government of 1906 came into power, it introduced a patent bill in which it was enacted that any foreign firm which was granted an English patent must set up a factory in England. This was interpreted by McTaggart as a betrayal of the free-trade citadel; and, as all parties were now faithless to his Dulcinea, he was able to return with an easy conscience to the one which did not outrage all his other convictions and sentiments.

Perhaps the only political opinion of McTaggart's which is, at first sight, hard to reconcile with Whig principles is his belief in compulsory military service. This he had held strongly many years before the war, when it was highly unpopular with most Englishmen. But was not this really 'an appeal from the new to the old Whigs'? For did not the Whigs of Charles II's time object to mercenary standing armies, and extol in their place the old national militia?

Another apparent paradox in McTaggart's opinions was that he was as strongly 'liberal' in university politics as he was 'conservative' in national politics. He was, e.g., a strong feminist in the matter of the admission of women to full membership of the university. This paradox, however,

depends largely on the usage of words. There is no essential connexion between liberalism and the view that men and women should be educated together, or between conservatism and the view that they should be educated separately. Nor is there any essential connexion between liberalism and the view that the colleges should be subordinated to the university, or between conservatism and the view that the university should be subordinated to the colleges. Yet those who hold the first alternative on these two subjects are called 'academic liberals', whilst those who hold the second are called 'academic conservatives'. There is thus no kind of inconsistency between academic liberalism and political conservatism, or between academic conservatism and political liberalism. If there were more men like McTaggart, who considered each question on its merits instead of dressing himself in a complete suit of ready-made opinions, such combinations would be much more frequent than they are, to the great benefit of both academic and national politics.

It remains to mention a few of McTaggart's more personal tastes and interests. He had a passion for ritual, which showed itself in his love of wearing his scarlet doctor's gown and taking part in university and college ceremonies. His knowledge of the history of university offices and rituals, of the minute details of procedure, and of the true order of the academic hierarchy, was extensive and accurate; and he was punctilious in insisting that no mistakes should be made in such matters. Perhaps this caused him to look with a slightly more lenient eye on popish than on protestant dissent; though it did not make him any less firm against the pretensions of the Bishop of Rome, or prevent him from referring to his church as 'the Roman schism'.

He loved good living, and he set an example to other married fellows by the great part which he played in the social and corporate life of the college. He dined regularly in Hall; attended all college feasts; and was a faithful supporter of the old custom of drinking wine nightly in the

Combination Room after dinner, a custom which has fallen into such decay in Trinity of late that McTaggart sometimes found himself on a week-night in the lonely, if splendid, situation of the Seraph Abdiel. Once a year he played at cards. The game, which was 'Beggar-my-Neighbour', used to be played after the Christmas Feast with another distinguished fellow of the College. McTaggart would start the game with sixpence in his pocket, and would play until he had lost it or until it was time to gather up his winnings and go home to bed; a system of limited liability which was highly characteristic of him. It was his custom after a feast to write down any story about a past or present member of the university which he had heard and had thought good. These stories, recorded each on a separate slip of paper, with the name of the teller, the date and occasion of the telling, and sometimes a few notes of his own, were kept in four file-boxes labelled 'College Stories'. He bequeathed them to an old friend; and we may perhaps venture to hope that, when a suitable time has gone by, they may be edited and printed.

McTaggart was an omnivorous reader of novels, good and bad. His memory for their plots and characters was extraordinary; he could, without apparent effort, give to an inquirer a full and accurate account of stories which he had read once years before. He was also devoted to those diaries, collections of letters, biographies, and memoirs which make the chief personalities of eighteenth-century England such living figures to ourselves. Few even of professional students of the eighteenth century can know their *Boswell*, their *Horace Walpole*, or their *Lord Hervey* better than McTaggart did. Certain Victorian poets had a great attraction for McTaggart; to judge from the frequency with which quotations from them occur in his works, his favourites were Browning and Swinburne. Such tastes and such knowledge made McTaggart a most valuable member of the library committee of the Union. His long and distinguished connexion with that society has been appropriately com-

memorated by setting apart a bookcase in the library, filling it with a collection of eighteenth-century memoirs bought by subscription, and affixing to it a brass memorial plate.

A biography, at best, is a series of photographs, taken from a limited number of positions, on a selectively sensitive plate, by a photographer whose presence affects the expression of the sitter in a characteristic way. There will certainly be omission and selection, and it is only too likely that there will be positive distortion. This sketch represents McTaggart as he appeared to one much younger than himself; whose relation to him was first that of pupil to teacher, and then, after a long interval and for too short a time, that of colleague. Those who knew him in his earlier years and in other relations would find much to add to this account, and perhaps something to alter in it. But no memoir of McTaggart which approximated to the truth could fail to convey the impression of a thinker of the very first rank, and of a rich, original, and lovable personality.

C. D. Broad.