

EMPIRICISM IN METAPHYSICS

The Nature of the World

An Essay in Phenomenalist Metaphysics. By W. T. Stace. Pp. vii + 262. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1940.) 18s. 6d. net.

THE book which bears this ambitious title is an essay in metaphysics on a phenomenalist basis. As was to be expected, the course of the inquiry leads the author to discuss most of the problems of philosophy. This fact may perhaps excuse any tardiness in this notice of the work, for it would be a poor compliment to the writer to offer an impression gained after a hasty reading. After two careful readings of this book I can say that, though I still disagree with the method and many of the conclusions, it is in my opinion one of the most important contributions to metaphysics which have appeared in recent years.

Prof. Stace is a thorough-going empiricist, at least in intention. The point where argument would break out is precisely whether the intention has really been fulfilled. Has any material been used in the construction which is not, in the strict sense, derived from experience? It seems to me that there is an *a priori* element in the metaphysical construction, and that it comes in at the place where Leibniz suggested that the *a priori* must be introduced when he added to the formula of empiricism "Nihil in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu," the phrase "nisi intellectus ipse".

However this may be, Prof. Stace conceives the purpose and method of philosophy in a thoroughly empirical and 'scientific' manner. The proper method of philosophy is, in his opinion, that of hypothesis. "An hypothesis is put forward regarding the nature of the concrete. An attempt is then made to show that this hypothesis 'explains' the known facts about the world. Finally, reasons are given why this hypothesis should be preferred to others which equally explain the facts." It should be added, however, that by 'explain' Prof. Stace means very much what science means by it, and not the finding of reasons for things or answers to the question 'why?'. It will be seen that Prof. Stace renounces the kind of insight which many philosophers have sought—one which would grasp the world as a rational whole and would find that in the end reality and value were reconciled.

The central concept of this metaphysical construction is that of the cell. The hypothesis put forward is that the universe is a plurality of cells,

all of which are of the same fundamental structure. Nothing exists except cells. Though the metaphysical conception of cells is, of course, suggested by the biological, it has properties which differentiate it from any scientific hypothesis. A metaphysical cell is absolutely indivisible. It is not material nor is it spiritual; it is the concrete reality of which matter and spirit are abstract aspects. Every cell consists of two parts, consciousness and datum, and cells differ in the quantitative and qualitative characters of their data. No doubt the hypothesis thus baldly stated has a paradoxical air, but its working out is calculated to remove the prejudices of common sense.

Naturally, Prof. Stace realizes that his theory has a resemblance to Leibniz's philosophy of monads, and it must be added that one of the most startling of Leibniz's assertions concerning his monads is repeated by Prof. Stace about his cells—they do not interact, they "have no windows". Leibniz felt that the appearance of interaction deserved at least some explanation, and he devised, to meet this need, his famous theory of the "pre-established harmony". Prof. Stace feels no such need; sufficient for him that in fact the cells do so function and develop that they appear to be interacting, that there is "cellular correspondence". It seems to me that other readers as well as myself will consider this cellular correspondence an odd feature of the world for which they would like an explanation, but Prof. Stace would reply that we were searching for what we cannot have—reasons.

It would be interesting to touch upon some more topics on which Prof. Stace has invited argument. He maintains that all consciousness is thinking, and that there is no such thing as will. In order to carry out this hypothesis, he has to employ the notion of "submerged concepts". Again, on the subject of values, he contends that the validity of value judgments and their universality has nothing to do with the "so-called objectivity" of values. This is a discussion which deserves attention.

I cannot think that what Prof. Stace has to say on religion and the reality of God is quite on the level of the rest of his book. He has perhaps not allowed himself sufficient space, and it may be hoped that he will devote a separate volume to the philosophy of religion.

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