REVIEWS.

The Nature of Existence. By J. M. E. M'Taggart. Vol. I. Cambridge University Press, 1921.—Pp. xxi+310.

For the last twenty years or so the labours of philosophers have been devoted rather to the investigation of the nature and certainty of alleged scientific knowledge than to the attempt to determine the nature of Reality as a whole by abstract reasoning. This limitation has been mainly the result of bitter experience of the futility of previous attempts at speculative metaphysics. A distrust of elaborate philosophical systems has always characterised England in general, and of late years has been specially characteristic of Cambridge in particular. To all these rules Dr M'Taggart is probably the most eminent living exception. He has always held that interesting and important facts can be proved of Reality as a whole by processes of deductive reasoning. Until lately he thought that this could be done by a method akin to the Hegelian dialectic. In the last work that he published before the present one his position was that the dialectic method is logically sound, and that it is applicable to the actual world, but that in the argument used by Hegel there are certain mistakes of detail, although the final result is substantially correct.

In the present work he has departed considerably further from Hegel. He still thinks that the dialectical method of reasoning, when properly understood, is logically sound. He still thinks, so far as I can gather from this volume, which is only the first of two, that Reality is of much the same nature as Hegel, on M'Taggart's interpretation of the Absolute Idea, asserted it to be. But he no longer thinks that Reality is such that the dialectical method applies to it. His present argument is a perfectly straightforward deductive one. At various stages new premises are introduced, but these are supposed either to be *a priori* self-evident propositions, or to be empirical propositions which everyone will in fact grant. There are only two of the latter used in this book, viz. (i.) that something exists, and (ii.) what exists has parts. Even the latter can be dispensed with if a certain important proposition, which M'Taggart introduces later on, and which he holds to be self-evident, be granted. And, unless it be granted, the most exciting things in the book cannot be proved.

I think it must be admitted that no *general* objection can be taken to such a method, however sceptical we may personally feel as to whether anything really important can be proved about Reality as a whole in this way. Each transition must, of course, be scrutinised to see if it is logically sound; but this is equally necessary with any deductive argument on any subject. It may be said at once that M'Taggart is most unlikely to be caught in a purely logical fallacy. The other place where careful scrutiny is needed is at the introduction of each new premise. There are two great dangers about propositions that are alleged to be self-evident. One is that they may prove to be merely verbal. Another is that you may accept them simply because you can see no alternative; and your failure to see an alternative may arise, either through lack of the necessary experience or imagination, or through an unconscious desire *not* to see it.

M'Taggart is fully awake to the second danger. This first volume is mainly a general discussion of categories, but in the next its results are to be applied to concrete problems, like human survival. M'Taggart sees quite clearly that here one is liable to be biassed by one's wishes, and that, in any case, the fact that we can *think of* only one sort of thing that fulfils the conditions laid down for existents in general does not *prove* conclusively that Reality can only *consist of* existents of that kind.

The first danger, I think, hardly gets the attention that it deserves. It seems to me that in a long chain of reasoning a word is liable to have one meaning in the self-evident premise in which it is first introduced, and another in some of the remote consequences that are deduced from this premise. Probably, if you give it this second meaning, the premise will no longer seem self-evident. I should say that the word " part " in M'Taggart's reasoning is liable to this objection. It is certainly ambiguous, and it certainly plays an important rôle in the development of the system; yet its ambiguity is nowhere explicitly noticed.

A great deal of M'Taggart's argument turns on alleged infinite regresses. He has no objection to infinity, as such, but he holds that certain kinds of infinite regress are vicious. His argument at many places takes the form: Unless so-and-so be true of Reality there will be an infinite regress at this point, and it is of the vicious kind. He seems to have taken over, without question, from Russell's *Principles of Mathematics*, the doctrine that an infinite regress is vicious when and only when it concerns the " meaning " of some concept. In view of the extreme ambiguity of the word " meaning," and of the important part that infinite regresses play in the argument, it would have been wise to give an independent discussion of the whole subject.

These are the main general criticisms that can be made on M'Taggart's argument. To enter into detailed criticism of particular transitions would be out of place here. I will, therefore, confine myself to mentioning some of M'Taggart's main results, and some of the more important and doubtful of his premises.

He first tries to show that, in dealing with the existent, we are dealing with the whole of Reality. The actual argument seems to me

to be in places very thin ; but the discussion is valuable as containing some excellent remarks on the nature of judgment, truth, and falsehood. M'Taggart rejects propositions, in the sense of Meinong's Objectives, and holds that truth and falsehood can be adequately dealt with by assuming nothing but facts, acts of judgment, and an ultimate relation of correspondence between the two.

M'Taggart now passes on to the category of substance. He defines it, rightly, as it seems to me, in such a way that events, states of mind, and many other entities which would not usually count as substances, do so. He accepts as self-evident that no two substances agree with each other in *all* their attributes, although they might agree in all those attributes which do not involve relations. He then tries to prove from this that every substance has a description which (i.) applies to it alone, and (ii.) is entirely in terms of general characteristics. The proof is performed by threats of a vicious infinite regress. I am not at all clear that the regress is vicious, and the proposition itself appears to me to be highly doubtful. It seems to me that, whenever we try to give a sufficient description of any existent, we have to bring in a reference to some substance (even if it be only a certain moment of time) which is known bodily by acquaintance. Thus a description like " the worst woman in London " contains an *explicit* reference to the substance London, and only becomes exclusive through a further *implicit* reference to the date at which the speaker uses the phrase.

M'Taggart next tries to prove that, if we arbitrarily suppose any substance to be different from what it actually is in any characteristic, we have no right to assume that any other substance would remain the same in any respect. This he calls the *Principle of Extrinsic Determination*, and carefully distinguishes from the *Intrinsic Determination*, which holds between one attribute and another when the first implies the second. The former is universal and reciprocal; the latter—which is the essence of what we mean by causation—is not universal, and is not in general reciprocal. In connection with the last point, there is an admirable discussion of Causation and of Induction.

Probably the most important, and certainly the hardest part of the book, is that which starts by dealing with the notion of Groups of Substances. The best example that one can take of this conception is a spatial whole, such as England, and the various sets of parts into which it can be cut. Any set of divisions which exactly fit together, without overlapping, to make up the surface of England, is a Set of Parts of England ; and such a set of parts is a Group. All the various sets of parts of England are said to have the same Content. The meanings of all these terms are quite clear for a substance, like England, which has extensive magnitude. M'Taggart applies them, however, to all kinds of substances, an extension which seems to me to call for a good deal of discussion.

This brings us to the crucial point of the whole system. It seems self-evident to M'Taggart that every substance has content, *i.e.* that it has sets of parts, and that every part in every set has sets of parts,

and so on without end. Now, when this is combined with the proposition, which he claims to have proved earlier, that every substance must have an exclusive description in general terms, we are threatened with an infinite regress, which he holds to be vicious. The only way to avoid the regress is to suppose that every substance has a set of parts whose sufficient descriptions imply sufficient descriptions of their own and all subsequent sets of parts. This subject is treated under the title of Determining Correspondence. The matter is too technical for discussion here, and the reader must be referred to M'Taggart's book. It is enough to say that the only example that M'Taggart can suggest of a substance which fulfils the required conditions is a society of percipient beings who perceive each other, themselves, and the parts of each other and themselves, and so on, and perceive nothing else. Certain other conditions have to be fulfilled by their perceptions, which render these beings, on the face of them, rather unlike ourselves. Thus at last, and by a very peculiar route, we reach a proof that a certain kind of Spiritual Pluralism is probably the only satisfactory description of Reality as a whole.

In the next volume the details of this view will no doubt be worked out, and an attempt will be made to reconcile it with the many *prima-facie* appearances to the contrary which the world, as we think we know it, presents. In the meanwhile, philosophers cannot do better than to study this most interesting volume carefully, so as to make themselves familiar with the general topography of the Celestial City, before it finally descends from the University Press.

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The Rational Good: A Study in the Logic of Practice. By L. T. Hobhouse.—London: George Allen & Unwin, 1921.—Pp. 165.

This volume is the first of a series of three books in which Professor Hobhouse proposes to deal with the fundamental principles of sociology. Here he is concerned to lay the foundations of a rational system of ethics, while the other volumes, which will be eagerly awaited by all students of society, are presumably to deal with the applications of ethical principles to the problems of social structure and evolution.

The title admirably indicates the aim of the work, which is to discover whether there is a rational criterion or standard of values in human life to which human conduct and social institutions may be referred for judgment. The plan followed by Professor Hobhouse may be briefly indicated. There is, first, a psychological inquiry into the nature of the springs of action with a view of determining the actual rôle of reason in the practical life. Then follows an analysis of what is meant by the terms "rational," "good," and "rational good." A more concrete account is then given of the ideal of life in two chapters entitled "The Realised Good" and "Applications."