III.—TIME AND THE HEGELIAN DIALECTIC. (II.)

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At the end of the first part of this paper (Mind of October last) we had arrived at the conclusion that the conception of the dialectic process as eternally realised involved the assertion that the universe was fundamentally perfect, and that Hegel's attempt to explain away the obvious imperfection around us, by treating it as a delusion, had failed to bring the perfection of reality, and the imperfection of appearance, into harmony with one another.

Is there any other method which might be more successful? Can the denial of the ultimate reality of time, which caused the difficulty, by rendering it necessary to take the dialectic as eternally realised, be made to cure the wound which it has itself made? Would it not be possible, it might be said, to escape from our dilemma in this way? The dialectic itself teaches us that it is only the concrete whole which is completely rational, and that any abstraction from it, by the very fact that it is an abstraction, must be to some degree false and contradictory. An attempt to take reality, moment by moment, element by element, must make it appear imperfect. The complete rationality is only in the whole which transcends all these elements, and any one of them, considered as more or less independent, must be false. Now, if we look at the universe as in time, it will appear to be a succession of events, so that only part of it is existing at any given instant, the rest being either past or future. Each of these events will be represented as real in itself, and not merely as a moment in a real whole. And in so far as events in time are taken to be, as such, real, it must follow that reality does not appear rational. If an organic whole—and such we have taken the universe to be—is perfect, then any one of its parts, taken separately from the whole, cannot possibly be perfect. For in such a whole all the parts presuppose one another, and any one, taken by itself, must bear the traces of its isolation and incompleteness. And not only each event, but the whole universe taken as a series of events, would thus appear imperfect. Even if such a series could ever be complete, it could not fully represent the reality, since the parts would still, by their existence in time, be isolated from one another, and claim some amount

of independence. Thus the apparent imperfection of the universe would be due to the fact that we are regarding it *sub specie temporis*—an aspect which we have seen reason to conclude that Hegel himself did not regard as adequate to reality. If we could only see it *sub specie æternitatis*, we should see it in its real perfection.

It is true, I think, that in this way we get a step nearer to the goal required than we do by Hegel's own theory, which we previously considered. Our task is to find, for the apparent imperfection, some cause whose existence will not interfere with the real perfection. We shall clearly be more likely to succeed in this, in proportion as the cause we assign is a purely negative one. In the former case the appearance of imperfection was accounted for as a delusion of our minds. A delusion is a positive fact, and wants a positive cause, and, as we have seen, it is impossible to conceive this positive cause, except as something which will prevent the imperfection being a delusion at all. Then, however, the cause of the imperfection is nothing but the fact that we do not see everything at once. Seen as we see things now, the world must be imperfect. But if we can attain to the point of looking at the whole universe *sub specie æternitatis*, we shall see just the same subject-matter as in time; but it will appear perfect, because seen as a single concrete whole, and not as a succession of separated abstractions. The only cause of the apparent imperfection will be the negative consideration that we do not now see the whole at once.

This theory would be free from some of the objections which are fatal to a rather similar apology for the universe often put forward by optimistic systems. They admit that from the point of view of individuals the world is imperfect and irrational, but assert that these blemishes would disappear if we could look at the world as a whole. Such a theory, since it declares that the universe can be really perfect, although imperfect for individuals, implies that some individuals, at any rate, can be treated merely as means and not as ends in themselves. Without inquiring whether such a view is at all tenable, it is at any rate clear that it is incompatible with what is usually called optimism, since it would permit of many—indeed of all—individuals being doomed to eternal and infinite misery. We should be led to the formula in which Mr. Bradley sums up optimism. "The world is the best of all possible worlds, and everything in it is a necessary evil" (*Appearance and Reality*, p. xiv.). For if the universal harmony can make any evil to

individuals compatible with its own purposes, there is no principle upon which we can limit the amount which it can tolerate. Such a view could not possibly be accepted as in any way consistent with Hegel's system. It would be in direct opposition to its whole tendency, which is to regard the universal as only gaining reality and validity when, by its union with the particular, it becomes the individual. For Hegel the ideal must lie, not in ignoring the claims of individuals, but in seeing in them the embodiment of the universal.

Mr. Bradley's own treatment of the problem is of a rather similar type. He has to reconcile the harmony which he attributes to the Absolute with the disharmony which undoubtedly prevails, to some extent, in experience. This he does by taking the finite individual to be, as such, only appearance and not reality, from which it follows that it must distort, and cannot adequately partake in, the harmony of the Absolute. It may be doubted whether we do not fall into more difficulties than we avoid by this low estimate of the conscious individual. But, at any rate, such a solution would be impracticable for any one who accepted Hegel's version of the Absolute Idea, to which the individual is the highest form that the universal can take.

The objections which apply to the attempt to save the perfection of the Absolute by ignoring the claims of individuals will not apply to our endeavour to escape from our difficulty by ignoring, so to speak, the claims of particular moments of time. None of those considerations which make us consider each separate person as an ultimate reality, whose claims to self-realisation must be satisfied, and cannot be transcended, apply to separate periods of time. Indeed the whole drift of Hegel's system is as much against the ultimate reality of a succession of phenomena, as such, as it is for the ultimate reality of individual persons, as such. To deny *any* reality in what now presents itself to us as a time-series would indeed be suicidal. For we have no data given us for our thought, except in the form of a time-series, and to destroy our data would be to destroy our superstructure. But while philosophy could not start if it did not accept its data, it could not proceed if it did not alter them. There is then nothing obviously impossible in the supposition that the whole appearance of succession in our experience is, as such, unreal, and that reality is one timeless whole, in which all that appears successive is really coexistent, as the houses are coexistent which we see successively from the windows of a train.

It cannot, however, be said that this view is held by Hegel himself. In the Philosophy of Nature he treats time as a stage in the development of nature, and not as a cause why there is any successive development at all. Indeed he says there (§ 258) that things are not finite because they are in time, but are in time because they are finite. It would be thus impossible, without departing from Hegel, to make time the cause of the apparent imperfection of the universe.

Everything else in the Hegelian philosophy may indeed be considered as of subordinate importance to the Dialectic, and to its goal, the Absolute Idea. If it were necessary, to save the validity of the Dialectic, we might reject Hegel's views even on a subject so important as time, and yet call ourselves Hegelians. But we should not gain much by this reconstruction of the system. For it leaves the problem no more solved than it was before. The difficulty which proved fatal to Hegel's own attempt to explain the imperfection comes back as surely as before, though it may not be quite so obvious. However much we may treat time as mere appearance, it must, like all other appearance, have reality behind it. The reality, it may be answered, is in this case the timeless Absolute. But this reality will have to account, not merely for the facts which appear to us in time, but for this appearance of succession which they do undoubtedly assume. How can this be done? What reason can be given why the eternal reality should manifest itself in a time process at all? If we tried to find the reason outside the nature of the eternal reality, we should be admitting that time had some independent validity, and we should fall back into all the difficulties mentioned in the first part of this paper. But if we try to find the reason inside the nature of the eternal reality, we shall find it to be incompatible with the complete rationality which, according to Hegel's theory, that reality must possess. For the process in time is, by the hypothesis, the root of all irrationality, and how can it spring from anything which is quite free of irrationality? Why should a concrete and perfect whole proceed to make itself imperfect, for the sake of gradually getting rid of the imperfection again? If it gained nothing by the change, could it be completely rational to undergo it? But if it had anything to gain by the change, how could it previously have been perfect?

We have thus failed again to solve the difficulty. However much we may endeavour to make the imperfection of the universe merely negative, it is impossible to escape from the fact that, as an element in presentation, it requires a

positive cause. If we denied this, we should be forced into the position that not only was our experience of imperfection a delusion, but that it was actually non-existent. And this, as was mentioned above, is an impossibility. All reasoning depends on the fact that every appearance has a reality of which it is the appearance. Without this we could have no possible basis upon which to rest any conclusion.

Yet, on the other hand, so long as we admit a positive cause for the imperfection, we find ourselves to be inconsistent with the original position from which we started. For that position asserted that the sole reality was absolutely perfect. To this real perfection as cause, we have to ascribe apparent imperfection as effect. Now it is not impossible, under certain circumstances, to imagine a cause as driven on, by a dialectic necessity, to produce an effect different from itself. But in this case it does seem impossible. For any self-determination of a cause to produce its effect must be due to some incompleteness in the former without the latter. But if the cause, by itself, was incomplete, it could not, by itself, be perfect. If, on the other hand, it is perfect, it is impossible to see how it could be determined to produce a result alien to itself. Thus we oscillate between two extremes, each equally fatal. If we endeavour to treat evil as absolutely unreal, we have to reject the one basis of all knowledge. But in so far as we accept it as a manifestation of reality, we find it impossible to avoid qualifying the cause by the nature of the effect which it produces, and so contradicting the main result of the dialectic—the harmony and perfection of the Absolute.

We need not, after all, be surprised at the apparently insoluble problem which confronts us. For the question has developed into the old difficulty of the origin of evil, which has always baffled both theologians and philosophers. The original aim of the dialectic was to prove that all reality was completely rational. And Hegel's arguments led him to the conclusion that the universe, as a whole, could not be rational, except in so far as each of its parts found its own self-realisation. It followed that the universe, if harmonious on the theoretical side, would be harmonious also from a practical aspect—that is, would be in every respect perfect. This produces a dilemma. Either the evil round us is real, or it is not. If it is real, then reality is not perfectly rational. But if it is absolutely unreal, then all our finite experience —and we know of no other—must have an element in it which is absolutely irrational, and which, however much we may pronounce it to be unreal, has a disagreeably powerful

influence in moulding the events of our present life. Nor can we even hope that this element is transitory, and comfort ourselves, in orthodox fashion, with the hope of a heaven in which the evil shall have died away, while the good remains. For we cannot assure ourselves of such a result by any empirical arguments from particular data, which would be hopelessly inadequate to support such a conclusion. The only chance would be an *a priori* argument founded on the essential rationality of the universe, which might be held to render the imperfection transitory. But we should have no right to use such an argument. To escape the difficulties involved in the present coexistence of rationality and irrationality, we have reduced the latter to such complete unreality that it is not incompatible with the former. But this cuts both ways. If the irrationality cannot interfere with the rationality so as to render their present coexistence impossible, there can be no reason why their future coexistence should ever become impossible. If the irrational is absolutely unreal now, it can never become less real in the future. Thus our ascription of complete rationality to the universe leads us to a belief that one factor in experience, as it presents itself to us, is fundamentally and permanently irrational—a somewhat singular conclusion from such a premise.

To put the difficulty from a more practical point of view, either the imperfection in experience leaves a stain on perfection, or it does not. If it does, there is no absolute perfection, and we have no right to expect that the imperfection around us is a delusion or a transitory phase. But if it does not, then there is no reason why the perfection should ever feel intolerant of it, and again we have no right to hope for its disappearance. The whole practical interest of philosophy is thus completely overthrown. It asserts an abstract perfection beyond experience, but that is all. Such a perfection might almost as well be a Thing-in-itself, since it is unable to explain any single fact of experience without the aid of another factor, which it may call unreal, but which it finds indispensable. It entirely fails to rationalise it or to reconcile it with our aspirations.

The conclusion we have reached is one which it certainly seems difficult enough to reconcile with continued adherence to Hegelianism. Of the two possible theories as to the relation of time to the dialectic process, we have found that one, besides involving grave difficulties in itself, is quite inconsistent with the spirit of Hegel's system. The other, again, while consistent with that system, and, indeed, appearing to

be its logical consequence, has landed us in what seems to be a glaring contradiction to the facts. Is it not inevitable that we must reject a system which leads us to such a result?

Before deciding on such a course, however, it might be wise to see if we can really escape from the difficulty in such a way. If the same problem, or one of like nature, proves equally insoluble in any possible system, we may be forced to admit the existence of an incompleteness in our philosophy, but we shall no longer have any reason to reject one system in favour of another. Now, besides the theory which has brought us into this trouble—the theory that reality is fundamentally rational—there are, it would seem, three other possibilities. Reality may be fundamentally irrational. It may be the product of two independent principles of rationality and irrationality. Or it may be the work of some principle to which rationality and irrationality are equally indifferent—some blind fate, or mechanical chance.

These possibilities may be taken as exhausting the case. It is true that, on Hegelian principles, a fifth alternative has sometimes to be added, when we are considering the different combinations in which two predicates may be asserted or denied of a subject. We may say that it is also possible that the two predicates should be combined in a higher unity. This would leave it scarcely correct to say, without qualification, that either is asserted or either denied of the subject. But synthesis is itself a process of reasoning, and unites its two terms by a category in which we recognise the nature of each extreme as a subordinate moment, which is harmonised with the other. The harmony involves that, wherever a synthesis is possible, reason is supreme. And so, if the truth were to be found in a synthesis of the rational and the irrational, that synthesis would itself be rational—resolving, as it would, the whole universe into a unity expressible by thought. Thus we should have come round again to Hegel's position that the world is fundamentally rational.

We need not spend much time over the supposition that the world is fundamentally irrational—not merely regardless of reason, but contrary to reason. To begin with, such a hypothesis refutes itself—first, because it would explain the world by the fact that it was completely incapable of explanation, and, secondly, because the conception of complete irrationality is self-contradictory. The completely irrational could never be known to exist, for even to say a thing exists implies its determination by at least one predicate, and

therefore its comparative rationality. More particularly, we may remark here that such a theory would meet with a difficulty precisely analogous to that which conflicts with Hegel's theory, except that in this case the stumbling-block would lie, not in the existence of some irrationality in the universe, but in the existence of some rationality. To explain away the latter would be as impossible as we have found it to be to explain away the former. Yet it is at least as impossible to conceive how the fundamentally irrational should manifest itself as rationality, as it is to conceive the converse process. We shall gain nothing, then, by deserting Hegel for such a theory as this.

It might seem as if a dualistic theory would be well adapted to the chequered condition of the actual world. But as soon as we try to construct such a theory, difficulties arise. The two principles, of rationality and irrationality, to which the universe is referred, will have to be absolutely separate and independent. For if there were any common unity to which they should be referred, it would be that unity and not its two manifestations which would be the ultimate explanation of the universe, and our theory, having become monistic, resolves itself into one of the others, according to the attitude of this single principle towards reason, whether favourable, hostile, or indifferent.

We must then refer the universe to two independent and opposed forces. Nor will it make any important difference if we make the second force to be, not irrationality, but some blind force not in itself hostile to reason. For in order to account for the thwarted rationality which meets us everywhere in the universe, we shall have to suppose that the result of the force is, as a fact, opposed to reason, even if opposition to reason is not its essential nature.

In the first place, can there be really two independent powers in the universe? Surely not. As Mr. Bradley remarks (*Appearance and Reality*," p. 141), "Plurality must contradict independence. If the beings are not in relation, they cannot be many; but if they are in relation they cease forthwith to be absolute. For, on the one hand, plurality has no meaning, unless the units are somehow taken together. If you abolish and remove all relations, there seems no sense left in which you can speak of plurality. But, on the other hand, relations destroy the real's self-dependence. For it is impossible to treat relations as adjectives, falling simply inside the many beings. And it is impossible to take them as falling outside somewhere in a sort of unreal void, which makes no difference to anything.

Hence . . . the essence of the related terms is carried beyond their proper selves by means of their relations. And, again, the relations themselves must belong to a larger reality. To stand in a relation and not to be relative, to support it and yet not to be affected and undermined by it, seem out of the question. Diversity in the real cannot be the plurality of independent beings. And the oneness of the Absolute must hence be more than a mere diffused adjective. It possesses unity as a whole and as a single system."

The argument has additional strength in this case. For the two forces which we are asked to take as absolutely opposed are, by the hypothesis which assumed them, indissolubly united. Both forces are regarded as all-pervading. Neither can exist by itself anywhere. Every fact in the universe is due to the interaction of the two. And, further, they can only be described and defined in relation to one another. If the dualism is between the rational and the irrational as such, it is obvious that the latter, at any rate, has only meaning in relation to its opposite. And if we assume that the second principle is not directly opposed to rationality, but simply indifferent to it, we shall get no further in our task of explaining the imperfect rationality which appears in our data, unless we go on to assume that its action is contrary to that of a rational principle. Thus a reference to reason would be necessary, if not to define our second principle, at any rate to allow us to understand how we could make it available for our purpose.

We cannot, besides, describe anything as irrational, or as indifferent to reason, without ascribing to it certain predicates—Being, Substance, Limitation, for example. Nor can we refer to a principle as an explanation of the universe without attributing to it Causality. These determinations may be transcended by higher ones, but they must be there, at least as moments. Yet anything to which all these predicates can be ascribed cannot be said to be entirely hostile or indifferent to reason, for it has some determinations common to it and to reason, and must be, therefore, in more or less harmony with the latter. But if this is so, our complete dualism fails us.

The two principles then can scarcely be taken as absolutely independent. But if they cannot our dualism fails to help us, and indeed vanishes. We were tempted to resort to it because the two elements in experience—the rationality and the want of rationality—were so heterogeneous as to defy reduction to a single principle. And if we cannot keep our two principles distinct, but are compelled to regard them as

united in a higher unity, we might as well return explicitly to monism.

But even if we could keep the two principles independent, it seems doubtful if we should be able to reach by means of this theory a solution of our difficulty. The forces working for and against the rationality of the universe must either be in equilibrium or not. If they are not in equilibrium, then one must be gaining on the other. The universe is then fundamentally a process. In this case we shall gain nothing by adopting dualism. For the difficulties attendant on conceiving the world as a process were just the reason which compelled us to adopt the theory that the universe was at present perfectly rational. The process must be finite in length, since we can attach no meaning to an actual infinite process. And since it is still continuing, we shall have to suppose that the two principles came into operation at a given moment, and not before. And since these principles are, on the hypothesis, ultimate, there can be nothing to determine them to begin to act at that point, rather than another. In this way we shall be reduced, as before, to suppose an event to happen in time without antecedents and without cause, a solution which cannot be accepted as satisfactory.

Shall we succeed better on the supposition that the forces which work for and against rationality are exactly balanced? In the first place we should have to admit that the odds against this occurring were infinity to one. For the two forces are, by the hypothesis, absolutely independent of one another. And, therefore, we cannot suppose any common influence acting on both of them, which should tend to make their forces equal, nor any relationship between them, which should bring about this result. The equilibrium could only be the result of mere chance, and the probability of this producing infinitely exact equilibrium would be infinitely small. And the absence of any *a priori* reason for such an equilibrium could not, of course, be supplied by empirical observation. For the equilibrium would have to extend over the whole universe, and we cannot carry our observations so far.

Nor can we support the theory by the consideration that it, and no other, will explain the undoubted coexistence of the rational and the irrational in our present world. For it fails to account for the facts. It fails to explain the existence of change—at any rate of that change which leaves anything more or less rational, more or less perfect, than it was before. It is a fact which cannot be denied that sometimes that

which was good becomes evil, and sometimes that which was evil becomes good. Now, if the two principles are exactly balanced, how could such a change take place? Of course we cannot prove that the balance between the two forces does not remain the same, if we consider the whole universe. Every movement in the one direction, in one part of the whole, may be balanced by a corresponding move in the other direction somewhere else. As we do not know the entire universe in detail, it is quite impossible for us to refute this. But this will not remove the difficulty. We have two principles whose relations to one another are constant. Yet the facts around us, which are manifestations of these two principles, and of these two principles only, are constantly changing. If we are to take time and change as ultimate facts, such a contradiction seems insuperable. On the other hand, to deny the ultimate validity of time and change, commits us to the series of arguments, the failure of which first led us to doubt Hegel's position. If time could be viewed as a manifestation of the timeless, we need not have abandoned monism, for the difficulty of imperfection could then have been solved. On the other hand, if time cannot be viewed in this way, the contradiction between the unchanging relation of the principles and the constant change of their effects appears hopeless.

There remains only the theory that the world is exclusively the product of a principle which regards neither rationality nor irrationality, but is directed to some aim outside them, or to no aim at all. Such a theory might account, no doubt, for the fact that the world is not a complete and perfect manifestation either of rationality or of irrationality. But it is hardly exaggerated to say that this is the only fact about the world which it would account for. The idea of such a principle is contradictory. We can have no conception of its operation, of its nature, or even of its existence, without bringing it under some predicates of the reason. And if this is valid, then the principle is, to some extent at least, rational. Even this would be sufficient to destroy the theory. And, besides this, we should have to refute the detail of Hegel's dialectic before we could escape the conclusion that, if any categories of reason can be predicated of any subject, we are bound to admit the validity of the Absolute Idea of the same subject-matter, so that whatever is rational in part must be rational completely.

It would seem then that any other system offers as many obstacles to a satisfactory explanation of our difficulty as were presented by Hegel's theory. Is the inquirer then

bound to take refuge in complete scepticism, and reject all systems of philosophy, since none can avoid inconsistencies or absurdities on this point? This might perhaps be the proper course to pursue, if it were possible. But it is not possible. For every word and every action implies some theory of metaphysics. Every assertion or denial of fact—including the denial that there is any certain knowledge at all—asserts that something is certain. And to assert this, and yet to reject all ultimate explanations of the universe, is a contradiction at least as serious as any of those into which we were led by our attempt to explain away imperfection in obedience to the demands of Hegel's system.

We find then as many, and as grave, difficulties in our way when we take up any other system, or when we attempt to take up no system at all, as met us when we considered Hegel's theory, and our position towards the latter must be to some degree modified. We can no longer reject it, because it appears to lead to an absurdity, if every possible form in which it can be rejected involves a similar absurdity. At the same time we cannot possibly acquiesce in an unreconciled contradiction. Is there any other course open to us?

We must remark, in the first place, that the position in which the system finds itself, though difficult enough, is not a *reductio ad absurdum*. When an argument ends in such a reduction, there can never be any hesitation or doubt about rejecting the hypothesis with which it started. It is desired to know if a certain proposition is true. The assumption is made that the proposition is true, and it is found that the assumption leads to a contradiction. Thus there is no conflict of arguments. The hypothesis was made, not because it had been proved true, but to see what results would follow. Hence there is nothing to contradict the inference that the hypothesis must be false, which we draw from the absurdity of its consequences. On the one side is only a supposition, on the other ascertained facts.

This, however, is not the case here. The conclusion, that the universe is timelessly perfect, which appears to be in conflict with certain facts, is not a mere hypothesis, but asserts itself to be a correct deduction from other facts as certain as those which oppose it. Hence there is no reason why one should yield to the other. The inference that the universe is completely rational, and the inference that it is not, are both deduced by reasoning from the facts of experience. Unless we find a flaw in one or the other of the chains of deduction, we have no more right to say that Hegel's dialectic is wrong because the world is imperfect,

than to deny that the world is imperfect, because Hegel's dialectic proves that it cannot be so.

It might appear at first sight as if the imperfection of the world was an immediate certainty. But in reality only the data of sense, upon which, in the last resort, all propositions must depend for their connexion with reality, are here immediate. All judgments require mediation. And, even if the existence of imperfection in experience was an immediate certainty, yet the conclusion that its existence was incompatible with the perfection of the universe as a whole, could clearly only be reached mediately, by the refutation of the various arguments by means of which a reconciliation has been attempted.

It is no doubt our first duty, when two trains of reasoning appear to lead to directly opposite results, to go over them with the greatest care, that we may ascertain whether the apparent discrepancy is not due to some mistake of our own. It is also true that the chain of arguments by which we arrive at the conclusion that the world is perfect, is both longer and less generally accepted, than the other chain by which we reach the conclusion that there is imperfection in the world, and that this prevents the world from being perfect. We may, therefore, be possibly right in expecting beforehand to find a flaw in the first chain of reasoning, rather than in the second.

This, however, will not entitle us to adopt the one view as against the other. We may expect beforehand to find an error in an argument, but if in point of fact we do not succeed in finding one, we are bound to continue to accept the conclusion. For we are compelled to yield our assent to each step in the argument, so long as we do not see any mistake in it, and we shall in this way be conducted as inevitably to the end of the long chain as of the short one.

We may, I think, assume, for the purposes of this paper, that no discovery of error will occur to relieve us from our perplexity, since we are not endeavouring to discuss the truth of the Hegelian dialectic, but the consequences which will follow from it if it is true. And we have now to consider what we must do in the presence of two equally authoritative judgments which contradict one another.

The only course which it is possible to take appears to me to be that described by Mr. Arthur Balfour (*Defence of Philosophic Doubt*, p. 313). We must "accept both contradictories, thinking thereby to obtain, under however unsatisfactory a form, the fullest measure of truth which" we are "at present able to grasp". Of course we cannot adopt

the same mental attitude which we should have a right to take in case our conclusions harmonised with one another. We must never lose sight of the fact that the two results do *not* harmonise, and that there must be something wrong somewhere. But we do not know where. And to take any step except this, would imply that we did know where the error lay. If we rejected the one conclusion in favour of the other, or if we rejected both in favour of scepticism, we should thereby assert, in the first case, that there was an error on the one side and not on the other, in the second case that there were errors on both sides. Now, if the case is as it has been stated above, we have no right to make such assertions, for we have been unable to detect errors on either side. All that we can do is to hold to both sides, and to recognise that, till one is refuted, or both are reconciled, our knowledge is in a very unsatisfactory state.

At the same time we shall have to be very careful not to let our dissatisfaction with the conflict, from which we cannot escape, carry us into an either explicit avowal or a tacit acceptance of any form of scepticism. For this would mean more than the mere equipoise of the two lines of agreement. It would involve the entire rejection, at least, of that one which asserts that the universe is completely rational. And, as has been said above, we have no right to reject either side of the contradiction, for no flaw has been found in either.

The position in which we are left appears to be this: If we cannot reject Hegel's dialectic, our system of knowledge will contain an unsolved contradiction. But that contradiction gives us no more reason for rejecting the Hegelian dialectic than for doing anything else. We are merely left with the conviction that something is fundamentally wrong in knowledge which all looks equally trustworthy. Where to find the error we cannot tell. Such a result is sufficiently unsatisfactory. Is it possible to find a conclusion not quite so negative?

We cannot, as it seems to us at present, deny that both the propositions are true, nor deny that they are contradictory. Yet we know that one must be false, or else that they cannot be contradictory. Is there any reason to hope that the solution lies in the last alternative? This result would be less sceptical and destructive than any other. It would not involve any positive mistake in our previous reasonings, as far as they went, which would be the case if harmony was restored by the discovery that one of the two conclusions was fallacious. It would only mean that we had

not gone on far enough. The two contradictory propositions —that the world was fundamentally perfect, and that imperfection did exist—would be harmonised and reconciled by a synthesis, in the same way that the contradictions within the dialectic itself are overcome. The two sides of the opposition would not so much be both false as both true. They would be taken up into a higher sphere where the truth of both is preserved.

Moreover, the solution in this case would be exactly what might be expected if the Hegelian dialectic were true. For, as has been said, the dialectic always advances by combining on a higher plane two things which were contradictory on a lower one. And so, if, in some way now inconceivable to us, the eternal realisation of the Absolute Idea were so synthesised with the existence of imperfection as to be reconciled with it, we should harmonise the two sides by a principle already expounded in one of them.

It must be noticed also that the contradiction before us satisfies at any rate one of the conditions which are necessary if a synthesis is to be effected. It is a case of contrary and not merely of contradictory opposition. The opposition would be contradictory if the one side merely denied the validity of the data, or the correctness of the inferences, of the other. For it would then not assert a different and incompatible conclusion, but simply deny the right of the other side to come to its own conclusion at all. But it is a contrary opposition, because neither side denies that the other is, in itself, coherent and valid, but sets up against it another line of argument, also coherent and valid, which leads to an opposite and incompatible conclusion. We have not reasons for and against a particular position, but reasons for two positions which deny one another.

If the opposition had been contradictory, there could have been no hope of a synthesis. We should have ended with two propositions, one of which was a mere denial of the other —the one, that the universe is eternally rational, the other, that this is not the case. And between two merely contradictory propositions, as Trendelenburg points out (*Logische Untersuchungen*, vol. i. p. 44), there can be no possible synthesis. One only affirms, and the other only denies. And between simple affirmation and simple negation we can find nothing which will succeed in reconciling them. For their whole meaning is summed up in their denial of one another, and if, with their reconciliation, the reciprocal denial vanished, the whole meaning would vanish also, leaving nothing but a blank. Instead of having equally strong grounds to believe

two different things, we should have had no grounds to believe either. Any real opposition may conceivably be synthesised. But it is as impossible to get a harmony out of an absolute blank, as it is to get anything else.

Here, however, when we have two positive conclusions, which appear indeed to be incompatible, but have more in them than simple incompatibility, it is not impossible that a higher notion could be found, by which each should be recognised as true, and by which it should be seen that they were really not mutually exclusive.

The thesis and antithesis in Hegel's logic always stand to one another in a relation of contrary opposition. In the higher stages, no doubt, the antithesis is more than a mere opposite of the thesis, and already contains an element of synthesis. But the element of opposition, which is always there, is always an opposition of contraries. Hence it does not seem impossible that this further case of contrary opposition should be dealt with in the same way as that which Hegel uses. Incompatible as the two terms seem at present, they can hardly seem more hopelessly opposed than any pair of contraries in the dialectic would seem, before their synthesis had been found.

It is possible, also, to see some reasons why such a solution, if possible at all, should not be possible yet, and why it would be the last abstraction to be removed as the dialectic process rebuilds concrete realities. Our aim is to reconcile the fact that the Absolute Idea exists eternally in its full perfection, with the fact that it manifests itself as something incomplete and imperfect. Now it is only as a process, and consequently as something incomplete and imperfect, that the Absolute Idea becomes known to us. We have to grasp its moments successively, and to be led on from the lower to the higher. We cannot therefore become aware of any inadequacy which there may be in the idea of process, or of any synthesis which would reconcile that idea with the idea of eternal existence, except as the last stage in our comprehension of the universe. The gradual comprehension is itself a process, and to pass beyond that form must be impossible while any further steps remain to be taken.

I am not, of course, trying to argue that there is such a reconciliation, or that there is the slightest positive evidence to prove that there can be one. As I have tried to show, the eternal realisation of the Absolute Idea, and the existence of change and evil, are, for us as we are, absolutely incompatible, nor can we even imagine a way in which they

should cease to be so. If we could imagine such a way we should have solved the problem, for as this way would be the only chance of rescuing our knowledge from hopeless confusion, we should be justified in taking it.

All I wish to suggest is that it is conceivable that there should be such a synthesis, although it is not conceivable what synthesis it could be, and that, although there is no positive evidence for it, there is no evidence against it. And as either the incompatibility of the two propositions, or the evidence for one of them, must be a mistake, we may have at any rate a hope that some solution may lie in this direction.

In so far as we are certain that neither the arguments for the eternal perfection of the Absolute Idea, nor for the existence of process and change, are erroneous, we should be able to go beyond this negative position, and assert positively the existence of the synthesis, though we should be as unable as before to comprehend of what nature it could be. We could then avail ourself of Mr. Bradley's maxim, "what may be and must be, certainly is". That the synthesis must exist would, on the hypothesis we are considering, be beyond doubt. For if both the lines of argument which lead respectively to the eternal reality of the Absolute Idea, and the existence of change could be known to be, not merely unrefuted, but true, then they must somehow be compatible. That all truth is harmonious is the postulate of reasoning, the denial of which would abolish all tests of truth and falsehood, and so make all judgment unmeaning. And since the two propositions are, as we have seen throughout this paper, incompatible as they stand in their immediacy, the only way in which they can possibly be made compatible is by a synthesis which unites by transcending them.

Can we then say of such a synthesis that it may be? Of course it is not possible to do so unless negatively. A positive assertion that there was no reason whatever why a thing should not exist could only be obtained by a complete knowledge of it, and, if we had a complete knowledge of it, it would not be necessary to resort to indirect proof to discover whether it existed or not. But we have, it would seem, a right to say that no reason appears why it should not exist. If the Hegelian dialectic is true (and if it were not, our difficulty would not have arisen) we know that predicates which seem to be contrary can be united and harmonised by a synthesis. And the fact that such a synthesis is not conceivable by us need not make us consider it impossible. Till such a synthesis is found it must always appear inconceivable,

and that it has not yet been found implies nothing more than that the world, considered as a process, has not yet worked out its full meaning.

But we must admit that the actual result is rather damaging to the prospects of Hegelianism. We may, as I have tried to show, be sure that, if Hegel's dialectic is true, then such a synthesis must be possible, because it is the only way of harmonising all the facts. At the same time, the fact that the dialectic cannot be true, unless some synthesis which we do not know, and whose nature we cannot even conceive, relieves it from an obstacle which would otherwise be fatal, certainly lessens the chance that it is true, even if no error in it has yet been discovered. For our only right to accept such an extreme hypothesis lies in the impossibility of finding any other way out of the dilemma. And the more violent the consequences to which an argument leads us, the greater is the antecedent probability that some flaw has been left undetected.

Not only does such a theory lose the strength which comes from the successful solution of all problems presented to it, but it is compelled to rely, with regard to this particular proposition, on a possibility which we cannot at present fully grasp, even in imagination, and the realisation of which would perhaps involve the transcending of all discursive thought. Under these circumstances it is clear that our confidence in Hegel's system must be considerably less than that which was possessed by its author, who had not realised the tentative and incomplete condition to which this problem inevitably reduced his position.

The result of these considerations, however, is perhaps on the whole more positive than negative. They can scarcely urge us to more careful scrutiny of all the details of the dialectic than would be required in any case by the complexity of the problems which the latter presents. And, on the other hand, they do supply us, as it seems to me, with a ground for believing that neither time nor imperfection forms an insuperable objection to the dialectic. If the latter is not valid in itself, we shall in any case have no right to believe it. And if it is valid in itself, we shall not only be entitled, but we shall be bound, to believe that one more synthesis remains as yet unknown to us, which shall overcome the last and most persistent of the contradictions inherent in appearance.