A commentary on Kant's Critick of the pure reason

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A COMMENTARY
ON
KANT'S
CRITICK OF THE PURE REASON,
&e. &c.
There can be no doubt that Kant's merits are being daily better appreciated in this country. The English public has gradually been trained to understand his nomenclature, and even some of his arguments, through the works of Sir William Hamilton and Mr. Mansel; and the knowledge of the German language is now so much extended in this country, that many are enabled to dispense with loose commentators and inaccurate translations. Even in Germany, the Schelling and Hegel fever has passed away; and most of our distinguished neighbours are again disposed to consider the great critic as νήφων παρ’ εἰκη λέγοντας τούς ὑστερον (if I may adapt Aristotle's remark on Anaxagoras.)

Still the difficulties and obstacles which meet the student when first approaching Kant are most formidable. Clumsy as are the works of most German professors, the great Critick of Kant is even among them remarkable for cumbrousness and prolixity; and the style is not more difficult than the subject. His system is, indeed, an organic whole, where each part exists for the sake of
the whole, and in connexion with it; but the complications, the ramifications, the subdivisions, are so great as totally to obscure at first the comprehension of the whole plan. But there are many English readers who have not even the privilege of being obstructed by the real difficulties of the original alone. They have to contend with grave mistranslations, and still worse with perversions and misrepresentations, put forward under the title of commentaries and explanations of the Critick. I speak of these difficulties from personal experience; and having myself first obtained a clear idea of Kant's system from the work which I now (with the author's sanction) submit to the English public, it is to be hoped that others will reap from it like benefit.

I call the reader's attention first of all to the fact, that Professor Kuno Fischer writes a clear, easy style, in short sentences. This extraordinary merit in a German philosopher deserves special notice, and has given him great reputation as a teacher and lecturer in his own country. Professor Fischer's thinking is also, in most instances, clear and precise, and his general conception of the bearing and relation of all the details in Kant's cumbrous treatise deserves the highest praise. But, like most very clear writers, he is, perhaps, apt to facilitate for himself his subject too much, and he has slurred over or misconceived some important difficulties in Kant's system. A very careful study of the Critick compels me, with much reluctance, to differ with him on these points;
and my objections have been recorded in the Introduction, and in various foot-notes appended to the translation of his text.

I trust the author will acquit me of all motives, save the love of truth, in opposing his arguments; but the very ability and value of his work have made me the more anxious to correct what does not appear to be corroborated by Kant. This sincere apology for the polemical tone of my own part of the volume will also apply to the able English philosophers whom I have criticized. Any one who understands the subject must know that Truth, in philosophy at all events, must be polemical—it must be attained by polemical discussion, and maintained by it.

This feature in Metaphysic, which is commonly urged as an objection, is in reality a singular recommendation to it as a valuable aid in mental improvement. It has been shown by Mr. Mill, and more recently by Mr. Grote, that the great deficiency of modern, as contrasted with Greek and mediæval education, is the absence of discussion. Formal debate, discussion per se, apart from the conclusions attained, was the great engine recognized by the Socratic teachers and the schools. Now, on the contrary, Mr. Grote has observed that conclusions only are taught and remembered; but the process by which they were attained, the antecedent doubts, difficulties, and failures, are all passed over in silence, or forgotten.

I think he might fairly have excepted Metaphysic,
where every conclusion is being constantly attacked, where almost nothing is considered settled, and where every author has to submit to the *elenchus* of an acute opponent.

Even supposing, then (what I do not admit), that we could attain no body of truth by Metaphysic, its importance as a discipline of the mind must be now greater than ever.

With regard to the plan of this book, it were better for those who are not familiar with Kant’s system to read the Introduction last, as it presupposes an acquaintance both with his system and his nomenclature. This Introduction was added, because foot-notes of great length would have encumbered the text; it does not profess to be more than a collection of hints towards the fuller comprehension of Kant, thrown together loosely, and sacrificing manner for matter. But I found it very difficult to compress what seemed useful within reasonable limits.

The material points of difference between my Introduction and Dr. Fischer’s interpretation of Kant, made it necessary to add the Appendices, which are literal translations of the more important passages in the First Edition of the Critick, omitted or rewritten by the author subsequently. The reader who compares these Appendices with Dr. Fischer’s work will see how marvelously different in point of style, and how clear and concise, the exposition is, as compared with the original treatise.