The Moderate Rationalism of W.H. Walsh

Moderate rationalism is the name that 'Richard' Walsh gives to a position he defends in Reason and Experience. He also calls it modified empiricism. Unmodified empiricism, he argues, confuses simple or immediate feeling and developed experience, but there is a great deal in what empiricists say about pure experience, despite the objections of their extreme rationalist critics. It is salutary to remind ourselves that one of the severest critics of empiricism, Hegel, has a healthy respect for 'pure' empiricism on account of the importance it gives to concrete facts. This importance is acknowledged also in Walsh's endorsement of Aristotle's maxim that the philosopher must take his cue from the experience of non-specialists and the practitioners of first order disciplines. But concrete facts are concrescences. Facts are judgements, products of judgemental acts. The word 'fact' has an ambiguity corresponding to that of the word 'experience' and to the distinction between the raw and the processed. There are raw experiences, but they are not objects of experience. They are not objects of any sort, whether public or private. 'It follows that the puzzling question on which empiricism founders, namely how we get from the world of private experience to the public world of common objects, need not even arise' (Kant's Criticism of Metaphysics, p.14). Kant himself may have fallen into this empiricist trap when he spoke of intuitions in immediate relation to objects as though the latter might be the referents of other objects, intermediate objects known as representations or ideas. There are no intermediate, immediate sensory objects. However, this does not mean that there are no pure experiences, though it does have consequences for our understanding of factuality. 'The point here is the old one that we do not apprehend any facts in sensation. Sensation is a passive state in which the given presents itself to us; but once we pronounce on its nature we have passed beyond sensation itself. Strictly speaking, facts are not independently existing realities but the product of judgement. And judgement, though it enters into perception, is no part of sensation' (RE, p.117).

The account so far given of Walsh's moderate rationalism draws on his first book, published in 1947, and the last one published in his lifetime nearly 30 years later. This is feasible partly because Kant's Criticism of Metaphysics, as its preface explains, includes material published originally as articles, and indeed its title is the same as that of his first article published as early as 1939. But, furthermore, many of the problems raised in Reason and Experience are ones to which he frequently returns. Not that the solutions first proposed always continue to satisfy him. For example, Reason and Experience asks how Critical philosophy can be possible in Kant's own terms, how he can explain the possibility of knowledge of principles of logic and the synthetic a priori principles of the understanding. The answer he proposes there is that Kant must assume that this knowledge is dependent on intellectual intuition, notwithstanding that this assumption contradicts a central tenet of the Critical doctrine. The paper entitled 'Philosophy and Psychology in Kant's Critique' (1966) maintains that it is incredible that Kant could have failed to see such a gross contradiction and that an alternative solution must be sought. The alternative put forward distinguishes primitive and derived philosophical propositions. The latter, of which an example is the proposition that the world of nature is a world of phenomena, are justified by transcendental proofs aimed at demonstrating what has to be the case given that we make certain fundamental distinctions like that between objective and subjective necessity. This distinction between two kinds of necessity is so fundamental that it must be regarded as a fact in a very special sense, a sense that Kant would mark by calling it a Faktum rather than a Tatsache. It is not however this distinction between two kinds of necessity that Walsh cites here to illustrate what he means by a primitive philosophical proposition. The example he mentions is the proposition that human intelligence is discursive, a proposition whose status he explains in his

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later reading of Kant by invoking Wittgenstein on language games and forms of life. Both this proposition and, it seems to me, the Faktum referred to above, are best regarded, following Walsh's suggestion, as 'the common possession of mankind', so familiar that if they are called into question everything else is called into question too. This will not prevent a philosopher asking whether alternative conceptual schemes are possible, and it is the limits of our conceptual scheme which Kant brings to our notice when he posits the possibility of beings whose mode of understanding is intuitive, that is to say, not dependent like our discursive understanding upon concepts whose instances usually occur serially in time.

This topic of intellectual intuition or intuitive understanding is a focal point of Walsh's philosophical preoccupations. If, as has been said, a philosopher is usually obsessed by a single dominating theme, this is it for the philosopher whose moderate rationalism we are in the course of trying to outline That this should be so has not a little to do with the circumstance that so much of his writing is motivated by a concern to assess the legitimacy of Hegel's agreements and disagreements with Kant. This is a concern not primarily for accuracy of textual interpretation, but a concern for what scholarship can reveal of what is of continuing value for us today. It is with that aim that he studies the history of philosophy and the philosophy of history. To the latter he devoted many technical papers in some of which, as in An Introduction to Philosophy of History (1951), there is a consideration of the question whether there could be a sort of intuition which is neither sensory nor purely formal. In the light of the view expressed in those writings that the historian is not especially interested in establishing general truths but in portraying the course of individual events, it has to be asked whether those events are understood thanks to an intuitive act such as seems to be postulated by Dilthey and Collingwood. One of Walsh's reasons for rejecting what he takes to be the claim made by Collingwood's theory of re-enactment is that it restricts historiography to what agents thought, whereas it is patent that historians are also interested in phenomena that are not rational in the sense Collingwood apparently intended. The theory that the historian re-enacts the agent's thinking is particularly implausible when the object is to make intelligible what happened in societies very different from his own. For this he must acquire knowledge of patterns of behaviour to which he is not accustomed from his own experience. That is to say, although the historian may not be seeking to formulate general principles, success in rendering individual events intelligible presupposes knowledge of generalities. This knowledge must be supplemented of course by imagination of the sort required also by the novelist.

As for imagination of the sort Kant styled figurative and introduced in his analysis of transcendental schematism, Walsh is inclined to believe that the role attributed to it is performed by the understanding. Mathematical schemata are maybe as near as human beings get to the intellectual intuition for which, as it is characterized in sections 76 and 77 of the Critique of Judgement, there would be no distinction between possibility and actuality or between universality and particularity, and for which what is known would be known at once ('Intuition, Judgement and Appearance' (1974), p.203; 'Hegel and Intellectual Intuition' (1946), p.61). 'Embarrassingly bad' is Walsh's comment on Hegel's argument that in these sections of the third Critique and in the chapter on schematism in the first Critique Kant unwittingly commits himself to making intuitive understanding available to human beings ('Kant as Seen by Hegel' (1982), p.105). Hegel does not take seriously enough Kant's insistence upon the non-constitutive function of the Ideas of Reason.

Kant's limitation of the Ideas to a regulative, practical function is taken seriously by Walsh, but years of reflection on what this amounts to leaves him no more persuaded than is Hegel of the coherence of this part of the Critical doctrine. Among the places where the results of this reflection are reported are Kant's Criticism of Metaphysics, 'Kant's Concept of Practical Reason' (1974) and the British Academy lecture 'Kant's Moral Theology' (1963), but uneasiness

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over the problem treated there is already manifest in a footnote of Reason and Experience which recognizes that it is inseparably linked, by way of the doctrine of schematism, to the problem of intellectual intuition. This footnote refers to 'a puzzling doctrine connected with his moral theology, but, like the latter, never sufficiently worked out' (RE, p.135), the doctrine in question being that the unschematized categories can be employed to think but not to know non-sensible objects. The article 'Kant and Metaphysics' (1976) contains a sympathetic appraisal of Heimsoeth's attempt to help Kant work out this doctrine, but finds that 'however successful Heimsoeth's interpretation is as an account of Kant's private assumptions, it is to say the least wildly paradoxical when taken as the truth about his public pronouncements': it cannot be reconciled with the verdict of the Transcendental Dialectic that it is illusory to suppose that a metaphysics of experience can be supplemented by a metaphysics of the supersensible. What then of Kant's metaphysics of morals? Does this not mark, in Heimsoeth's words, 'the final victory of the metaphysics of spirit and inwardness over the metaphysics of naturalistic rationalism' and, in Kant's own words, 'an extension of theoretical reason'? It all depends on what we think Kant means by 'think' and what we make of his claim that the Ideas of Reason may and must be used in scientific inquiry, not only in morals, 'from a practical point of view'. When Kant speaks of an extension of theoretical reason, does he mean that there is an extension of reason beyond theory or that theory extends beyond theoretical knowledge? The least we must say is that he does not mean that there is an extension of knowledge. Yet since the extension Kant has in mind appears to allow and demand the affirmation of God, Freedom and Immortality, it appears that there is a thinking here of truths, hence theoretical thinking in so far as that is a thinking of what is the case as opposed to what ought to be. For an intuitive understanding this distinction would not arise. But for human understanding it is unavoidable, and it is precisely because it is unavoidable that we have difficulty in grasping what could be intended in speaking of a proposition which is valid 'from a practical point of view'. This difficulty is the predicament that Kant called transcendental illusion, a symptom of this being our tendency to conceive structures of practice propositionally, a tendency that manifests itself in the temptation to construe the regulative as constitutive or, in Collingwood's terms, absolute presuppositions as relative. In one of Kant's usages the regulative is constitutive, namely when the dynamic principles of the understanding are described as regulative in order to contrast them with the mathematical principles which are constitutive in the sense that they permit the construction of pure objects, whereas the dynamic principles prescribe rules for seeking objects whose existence depends on what is given empirically. Nevertheless, the latter principles too are constitutive with respect to knowledge of empirical facts. The Ideas of Reason on the other hand, because they are ideas of possible totalities, can be no more than regulative of how we should seek a systematic unity of empirical facts, a function analogous to the teleological role they perform in enabling man to do what he can to bring about the highest good. Although, in the sphere of scientific research, the Ideas prescribe among other things that the scientist should aim at a minimum of theories that explain the maximum of facts, at any particular juncture of his journey toward this ideal it is up to him to decide whether to sacrifice multiplicity to unity or vice versa. The Ideas of Reason put him, so to speak, under an imperfect rather than a perfect obligation. Even so, according to Kant, the obligation is written into human nature no less than are the prescriptions imposed by the synthetic a priori principles of the understanding. Kant goes as far as to say that the former no less than the latter admit of a kind of transcendental deduction (B699).

Like Hegel, Walsh is struck by Kant's failure to exclude alternative principles to those based on his table of categories. But he is not convinced by Hegel's case for the necessity of the categories of his own system. History and hindsight teach that the bounds of sense shift. From this epochality it

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does not follow that the question which principles are prescriptive and definitive is straightforwardly empirical, since it is these very principles that determine what makes a question empirical. It would therefore be naive to adopt a classical empiricist interpretation of them along the lines of Hume's treatment of the notions of substance and cause, though this is not to say that Walsh does not have the highest respect for what Hume writes on these and other matters. Synthetic a priori principles determine also what is rational. If this seems to be at variance with the ultimacy Walsh, like Kant and post-Kantian idealists, ascribes to the concepts of coherence and comprehensiveness, it must be remembered that he contends that these concepts require supplementation by that of what is factully given (IPH, p.90). Further, all these concepts are quite formal concepts of colligation which are idle until they are articulated by synthetic a priori principles and which yield models of systematicity that differ according to the principles to which they are applied. From this _An Introduction to Philosophy of History_ infers that our theory of history may have to be one for which a single conception of rationality is no more than a pious hope. The biggest obstacle in the way of the Positivist historian's programme to found history on a science of human nature or of _Bewusstsein Überhaupt_ is that 'he needs not merely standard knowledge of how people _do_ behave in a variety of situations, but further a standard conception of how they _ought to_ behave. He needs to get straight not merely his factual knowledge, but also his moral and metaphysical ideas' (IPH, p.118). In particular, it can be added, he needs to get straight how the factual is permeated by moral and metaphysical ideas. And it is this, I believe, that helps us get straight what Walsh means when in his first book he says that he advocates moderate rationalism.

There is a paragraph in that first book that sums up a discussion carried out there of the question whether categories such as those dealt with by Kant have a rational or non-rational origin. It deserves to be quoted in its entirety here because of the light it casts on how its author's rationalism relates to the empiricism it modifies and the rationalism which it moderates and takes as its point of departure.

> It thus seems as if we might solve the problem of the rational or non-rational origin of the categories, the question whether reason or imagination governs our thinking about matters of fact, by a compromise satisfactory to both parties. The categories, on this view, are the ultimate concepts determining rational judgement as such; and to ask whether they are themselves rational is to ask a question which cannot be answered. We can agree with Kant, if we choose, that the principles based on these concepts should be associated with understanding because it is empirical _thinking_ that they determine; or we can emphasize, with Hume, that because they are neither self-evident nor demonstrable by formal reasoning they should be connected with an altogether different faculty, invoking here the notion of an _a priori_ imagination as their source and habitat. But each of these statements, though justified in its own way, is misleading in its implications. To connect the categories with understanding suggests that they are rational in a sense in which they cannot possibly lay claim to rationality; and to connect them with imagination implies that empirical thinking is a piece of passive behaviour rather than a rational activity. It is accordingly better to refuse the dilemma with which we have tormented ourselves throughout the discussion; to emphasize the unique status of categories among our concepts and of categorical principles among our judgements, and to point out that even if their removal would not entail, as Hume thought, that 'human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin', it would at least involve the destruction of all organized knowledge as we know it. (RE, p.184)

It might be objected that in this typically Walshian move to 'refuse the dilemma' there is a confusion of reason as the faculty that is given priority in

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rationalist theories of knowledge and, on the other hand, rationality as claimed in evaluative judgement of what stands to reason and makes good sense. There is a confusion, but not one due to inadvertence. It is one that we are being encouraged to make. One of the many lessons to be learned from the rethinking of Kant to which Walsh dedicated so much of his life is that theory of knowledge conducted in terms of faculties regarded as, to use Kant's word, elements, should be replaced by an approach that, instead of opposing reason to imagination, sensibility and the passions, takes as fundamental a complex notion of judgement from which they are only abstractions: judgement which, as intelligence or imaginative insight and primary discernment (Ur-teil), is the 'common root' of judgement as the assertion of theoretical propositions and of judgement as intelligence, imaginative insight and practical wisdom (qualities so abundantly evident in Walsh's life and work). It is attention to the last-mentioned of these virtues that Walsh finds lacking in Kant's theory of practical reason, though in calling this virtue moral know-how he runs a risk of attracting criticism of the kind that is bound to be an occupational hazard for a philosopher who, like the author of Metaphysics, puts into practice his own precept that philosophy is prescriptive and thereby implies that adjustments may have to be made that fall foul of sanctified linguistic usage. Kant is so over-awed by Plato's doctrine of Ideas and Aristotle's logic and doctrine of categories that he gives too little heed to the Nicomachean Ethics. Only Hegel has striven as unremittingly as Walsh to get this balance right, and the record Hegel has left of his efforts to do this lack the stylistic elegance which is a bonus of the record we inherit of Richard Walsh's endeavour, not least in his book on Hegel (Hegelian Ethics (1969)), a bonus we can be sure of enjoying again when we read the new book on Kant that he was writing when he died.

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Review Article

The Moral Appeal of Marx's Social Thought

Louis Dupré, Marx's Social Critique of Culture. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1983, pp. ix, 299, paperback £9.95.

John Elster, Making Sense of Marx. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press/Paris, Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1985, pp. xv, 556, hardback £32.50, paperback £10.95.

Both of these books treat Marx comprehensively and critically. Both examine the major facets of this thought - philosophical anthropology, methodology, and theories of history, economics, politics, and ideology - and discuss key concepts such as alienation, dialectics, fetishism, value, class, state, base-superstructure relation, and so on, in Marx and later Marxist and other literature. Both aim beyond commentary at a critical evaluation of Marx, and while both authors find much that is positive, they also identify serious flaws in his thought. They agree about the presence and nature of one of these, as we shall see, but disagree about Hegel's responsibility for it.

Both books have also been a long time in preparation and so merit attention as fruits of extended reflection by two eminent academics. Dupré is currently

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