

**INQUISITIO PHILOSOPHICA:  
AN EXAMINATION  
OF THE PRINCIPLES  
OF KANT AND HAMILTON**

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Inquisitio philosophica: an examination of the principles of Kant and Hamilton by M. P. W. Bolton

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**M. P. W. BOLTON**

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE PRINCIPLES  
OF KANT AND HAMILTON.

BY

M. P. W. BOLTON,

AUTHOR OF AN

"EXAMINATION OF THE PRINCIPLES OF THE SCOTO-OXONIAN PHILOSOPHY."

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INTRODUCTION.

IF the writings of an eminent metaphysician are criticised, and alleged inconsistencies pointed out in them, the criticism is sometimes met by urging that the metaphysician in question was a very able and learned man, and consequently could not have committed the mistakes ascribed to him. And the criticism may be further complained of as an attempt to pick to pieces the work of an author of high reputation, and to injure his fair fame.

Thus Mr. Mill having carefully examined the philosophical works of Sir W. Hamilton, and pointed out, as he conceives, a great number of discrepancies in them, a writer in the *Contemporary Review* blames him, as having "tasked all the resources of minute criticism to destroy

piecemeal the reputation of one who has hitherto borne an honoured name in philosophy." And further he says: "Mr. Mill's method of criticism has reduced the question to a very narrow compass. Either Sir W. Hamilton, instead of being a great philosopher, is the veriest blunderer that ever put pen to paper, or the blunders are Mr. Mill's own." But, it is urged, we cannot adopt the first alternative, since Hamilton's metaphysical abilities have been generally recognised; consequently, we must adopt the second, and regard the blunders as Mr. Mill's. Accordingly, the Reviewer censures Mr. Mill's statements as "a mass of misconceptions," displaying "an unusual deficiency of philosophical knowledge."

Here, however, we might urge against the Reviewer a similar alternative: "Either Mr. Mill is the veriest blunderer that ever put pen to paper, or the blunders imputed to him are the Reviewer's own. But Mr. Mill is not the greatest of blunderers—since it is generally recognised that his abilities are of a high order—therefore, &c."

If this style of reasoning were correct, it would apply to no one more strongly than to Sir W. Hamilton. Schelling and Hegel were philosophers who enjoyed great reputation; whose names have made much more noise in the world than Hamilton's. Yet Hamilton imputes to them blunders of the grossest description, deriding their fundamental doctrines as outrageously absurd—as fit for Laputa, not for reasonable beings. And he ridicules

these philosophers, and all who admire or resemble them, as

“*Gens ratione ferox et mentem pasta chimæris.*”

These criticisms would be disposed of in a very summary manner if it were lawful to argue as follows: “Schelling and Hegel were philosophers of high repute, exercising a powerful influence in Germany, and admired by many persons of great ability. Sir W. Hamilton by his method of criticism brings us to this pass: that we must either regard these philosophers as gross blunderers, or consider that the blunders are his own. The latter alternative is much the easier of the two.”

And Hamilton's criticisms of Brown, Kant, and Cousin might be disposed of in like manner.

But those who have studied metaphysics know well that it is possible to attribute great discrepancy and error to the works of a metaphysician, whilst feeling great respect for his intellect. Kant labours to prove that the metaphysical systems of Des Cartes, Leibnitz, and his predecessors were entirely null, while yet he greatly admired their abilities. Hamilton criticises very unfavourably the doctrine of Kant, declaring that it leads to the most melancholy consequences, to the worst and most pervading scepticism; and yet on many occasions he expresses high esteem of Kant's intellectual power. Schopenhauer professes with evident sincerity the highest admiration for Kant; yet he cross-examines him as rigorously as he can,