THE LAWS OF DISCURSIVE THOUGHT: BEING A TEXT-BOOK OF FORMAL LOGIC

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A TEXT-BOOK OF FORMAL LOGIC.

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PREFACE.

If we look back half a century we find Formal Logic taught in nearly all the colleges of Great Britain and America, but exercising an influence infinitely less than nothing (to use a phrase of Plato's) on the thought of the countries. Some of the professors and tutors were expounding it in a dry and technical manner, which wearied young men of spirit, and bred a distaste for the study; while others adopted an apologetic tone for occupying even a brief space with so antiquated a department, and threw out hints of a new Logic as about to appear and supersede the old. The lingering life maintained by that old Aristotelian and Scholastic Logic, in spite of the ridicule poured upon it by nearly all the fresh thinkers of Europe for two or three centuries after the revival of letters, is an extraordinary fact in the history of philosophy; I believe it can be accounted for only by supposing that the syllogism is substantially the correct analysis of the process which passes through the mind in reasoning. Certain it is that no proffered logical system has been able to set aside the Aristotelian, whether devised by Ramus, by the school of Descartes, the school of Locke, or the school of Condillac; all have

disappeared after creating a brief expectation followed by a final disappointment. It is a remarkable circumstance that the revived taste for logical studies in the last age proceeded from a restoration of the old Logic by two distinguished men, both reformers in their way, but both admirers of the Analytic of Aristotle. I refer to Archbishop Whately and Sir William Hamilton.

Whately first gave his views to the public in an article in the *Encyclopædia Metropolitana*, which was expanded into his *Elements of Logic* in 1826. The publication constitutes an era in the history of the study in Great Britain and America. The admirable defence of the old Logic against the objections of such men as Principal Campbell and Dugald Stewart, and still more, the fresh and apt examples substituted for the dry stock ones which had been in use for a thousand or two thousand years, speedily attracted the favorable attention of the young thinkers of the times; and Aristotle was once more in the ascendant. But while Whately's Elements is an interesting and healthy work, it can scarcely be described as specially a philosophic one. In order to complete the reaction, another thinker had to appear, and subject the whole science to a critical examination fitted to satisfy the deeper philosophic mind of the times. It is a curious circumstance that Hamilton uttered his first oracular declarations on Logic in a severe article on Whately, in the *Edinburgh Review*, published afterwards in his *Discussions*. He embraced the opportunity to bring forth the result of his profound researches, and specially to introduce to the English speaking countries, the Logic which had sprung up in Germany out of

Kant's *Critick of Pure Reason.* Since that date, Logic has had a greater amount of interest collected round it in Great Britain than any other mental science, and has become incorporated with the freshest and brightest thought of the country. The interest in the study has been increased by the *Logic* of Mr. John Stuart Mill, who has evidently felt the influence of Whately in the respect which he pays to Formal Logic, but adheres, as a whole, to the principles of his father, Mr. James Mill, introducing some elements from the cognate Positive Philosophy of M. Comte. Mr. Mill has given an impulse to the study, not by the portion of his work which treats of Formal Logic—which is not of much scientific value—but by his valuable exposition of the Logic of Induction, which would have been of much more value had he left out the constant defences of his empirical metaphysics.

Hamilton is entitled to be regarded as the author of the "New Analytic of Logical Forms"—as he calls it—after the Old Analytic, or syllogistic analysis of the reasoning process unfolded in the *Prior Analytics* of Aristotle. But he has had powerful co-laborers in Dean Mansel, in his valuable edition of Aldrich's *Artis Logicae Rudimenta* and *Prolegomina Logica*, and in Archbishop Thomson, in his *Outline of the Laws of Thought.* The clearest account of the new Logic is to be found, not in Hamilton's own Lectures, which were left in a crude state, but in the *Logic* of Professor Bowen, of Harvard College.*

* It is not my office to criticise the logical treatises of the United States; in fact I have not a complete collection of them. I have observed in some of them, as Atwater's excellent *Manual of Elementary Logic*, a disposition to unite the real improvements of the New Analytic with the established truths of the old Logic.

The New Analytic proceeds directly or indirectly from the metaphysics of Kant. Not that it is to be found developed in the works of Kant, but it is largely grounded on the peculiar principles of the *Critick of Pure Reason;* it rose out of the searching criticism to which Kant had subjected the forms of the Old Logic; and it ramified directly from the logical treatises of such men as Krug and Esser who belonged to the school. It is of a composite structure, resembling the renovations we see in Britain of medieval buildings, the old and the new adapted to each other with wonderful skill, but with an occasional incongruity forcing itself here and there on the notice of the careful observer. I am not convinced that all the parts are likely to be preserved in the shape they now have, or that the Analytic always gives the ultimate expression of the laws of thought; but I am sure it is a valuable accession to the science. Altogether independent of its positive improvements, it has done great service, by the careful examination to which it has subjected the Old Logic—which has come creditably out of the trial. Forms which had become venerable, and, I may add, stiff, from age; and which were inclined to stand on their dignity and acknowledged authority, have been obliged to submit to a sifting scrutiny, which may have shorn them of some of their ridiculous pretensions, but has, at the same time, delivered them from the dry dust which had gathered around them and threatened to bury them. The time has now come for subjecting the New Analytic to a like examination. It has been before us for an age in a half developed form, and for half an age in a fully unfolded shape; and we should now be in a suf-

ficiently impartial position to be able to take from it what is worthy of being retained, and to lay aside what is fallacious or mistaken.*

Had I been satisfied with the peculiarities of the New Analytic, with its fundamental Kantian principles, or its special doctrines, such as that of the universal quantification of the predicates of propositions with its extensive consequences, I would never have published this treatise. On the supposition of the Hamiltonian analysis being correct, I cannot conceive of there being better works written than those of Thomson and Bowen.

The defects and errors of the new Logic are derived mainly from its German paternity. It is infected throughout with the metaphysics of Kant—just as the *Art of Thinking* is with the metaphysics of Descartes, and Mill's Logic with the empiricism of Comte. It ever presupposes, or implies, that there are Forms in the mind which it imposes on objects as it contemplates them; and it makes the science altogether *a priori*, and to be constructed apart from, and altogether independent of experience. Hamilton quotes (*Logic*, Lect. IV.) Esser with approbation. "It is evident that in so far as a form of thought is necessary, this form must be determined or necessitated by the nature of the thinking subject itself. . . . The first condition of a form of thought is that it is subjectively, not objectively, determined." This fundamental error (so I reckon it) runs through the whole system, and injures and corrupts the valuable truth to be found in the Logic of Hamilton. I acknowledge

* I believe copies may be had of a limited edition of *Philosophic Papers* published by me, and in which I examined Hamilton's Logic. I have reviewed Mill's Logic in my *Examination of Mr. J. S. Mill's Philosophy.*