

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY

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PREFACE

Professor Harold Höffding is already well known to the English-speaking world through the translations of his *Psychology*, *Ethics*, *Philosophy of Religion*, *Problems of Philosophy* and his *History of Modern Philosophy* (2 vols.), all published by the Macmillan Company. The fact that his works are rapidly finding their way into English and other languages is the best evidence of the esteem in which his work is held and of his importance as a thinker. Born in 1843, professor of philosophy in Copenhagen since 1883, Doctor Höffding has worked over the whole field of philosophy with great thoroughness. The original (German) edition from which this translation is made appeared in 1905. It is therefore the fruit of his ripest scholarship. The book is clear, compact and comprehensive. The various schools are analyzed and criticized, and the thread of continuous development is constantly kept clearly in view. These features constitute the exceptional merit of the book as a text. The student is constantly aware that a familiar spirit is safely guiding him through the bewildering maze of philosophic problems and tentative solutions.

As a psychologist Doctor Höffding is an empirical introspectionist. He is thoroughly modern in his antipathy towards metaphysical speculation. He discovers a native tendency in man, manifesting itself in the impulse towards well-being, the source or further meaning of which is beyond our knowledge, which furnishes the basis of ethics.

Religion is the reaction of the human mind to the sense of value and represents the highest function of the human mind. As a critical empiricist he possesses a peculiar advantage in the interpretation of the trend of philosophic thought. We offer this book to the English student because of its merit, as an efficient guide to the understanding of modern philosophy.

C. F. SANDERS.

Gettysburg, Pa.

July 20, 1912.

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BRIEF HISTORY OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY

INTRODUCTION

THE subject matter of the history of philosophy consists of the efforts which individual thinkers have made to explain or perchance to solve the ultimate problems of knowledge and of being. Modern philosophy—i. e. the philosophy of the last three centuries—has been specially concerned with four great problems. These problems, moreover—as I have shown in my *Philosophic Problems* (Eng. Tr. 1905)—are intimately related to each other, and there likewise exists a most significant analogy between them, in that the antithesis of continuity and discontinuity is of fundamental importance in each of them, except that it manifests itself under different forms.

1. *The psychological problem* originates from the inquiry concerning the essential attributes of psychic life. Is the soul a distinct substance, or does its essential nature consist of a peculiar activity? Is the soul composed of a variety of independent elements, or is it characterized by unity and totality? The discussion of these questions can be of value only as it is based upon a detailed investigation of psychical phenomena and functions. It will likewise appear that the solution of these questions has a very important bearing on the treatment and the solution of the remaining philosophic problems.

Whilst psychological investigation finds its subject matter in the bare facts of psychic life, there are two

further problems which are conditioned by the antithesis of fact and value as it appears in psychic life, *the problem of knowledge* and *the problem of evaluation*.

2. *The problem of knowledge* springs from the inquiry into the presuppositions of knowledge and the limits within which our thought processes are valid (thus including the sphere of psychological investigation). The primary origin of thought is spontaneous, a reaction produced by events which are not the result of thought. To what extent are we then justified in ascribing real meaning to the results of thought? Wherein does the truth of knowledge consist?

3. Whilst the problem of knowledge has special reference to the intellect, *the problem of evaluation* grows out of the inquiry into the validity of judgments pertaining to human conduct and social institutions—particularly those that rest on the processes of will and emotion. What constitutes the standard for such a judgment? Upon what foundation does the validity of the concepts of good and bad rest? And is it possible to apply these concepts with logical consistency? The scope of the problem becomes increasingly comprehensive the moment we test the validity of the judgment, not only as pertaining to human conduct and vital forms, but likewise to Being and the universe in general. We then pass from the problem of ethics to that of religion.

4. Finally we may also inquire concerning the nature of Being, of which thinking, feeling and volitional being are but a single part. This gives rise to *the problem of Being*, i. e. the problem of cosmology or metaphysics. Is it possible to elaborate a general world theory according to scientific methods? And what would be the nature of such a theory? If we organize our experiences and

infer the ultimate consequences of our knowledge, what principles will furnish an adequate explanation of the universe?

The nature and method of the treatment of these problems will vary with the instruments of knowledge and the historical conditions of the different periods. And in those problems which lie on the borderland of thought even the personality of the thinker will likewise have its effect. It is for this reason that a comparative treatment of the problems as history presents them is of such great importance. The various statements and solutions of the problem possess more than a purely philosophic interest. They have likewise an important bearing on the history of civilization and on psychology. They are responses in a great discussion which is proceeding through ages. Each response is something more than a mere intellectual structure, it is likewise the sign of a spiritual current. The history of philosophy therefore bears a direct relation to the general history of culture and of mind

FIRST BOOK

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE RENAISSANCE

A. THE DISCOVERY OF THE NATURAL MAN

BURCKHARDT, in his famous treatise, *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*, characterizes the Italian renaissance as the discovery of man. The historical conditions led to the emancipation of the individual. Man was no longer estimated from the mere viewpoint of his relationship to the Church or to his guild. He now became the subject of specialized interest and study. The discovery of ancient literature and art likewise contributed to this end. Man found a distinct form of culture outside the Church, with laws and ideals of its own. This expansion of the horizon furnished the opportunity for comparative study. In the north Protestantism, with its emphasis on personal experience and its insistence that civil life is independent of the Church, showed a similar tendency. In this way it became possible even here to develop both a theoretical and a practical interest in things which are purely human. Hence, both in the north and in the south, we find a number of interesting movements in the realm of the mental sciences during the period of the Renaissance.

1. *Pietro Pomponazzi's* little book, *De immortalitate animæ* (1516), may be regarded as an introduction to the philosophy of the Renaissance. *Pomponazzi* was born at Mantua in 1462, served with great distinction in the capacity of teacher of philosophy in Padua and Bologna, and died in the latter city in 1525. His friendship with

Cardinal *Bembo*, who enjoyed the favor of Pope Leo X, saved him from persecution; but his book was burnt by the inquisition. His philosophic significance is due to his theory that the various forms and gradations of soul-life constitute a continuous natural series, and that ethics is self-explanatory. In opposition to the ecclesiastical Aristotelians he shows that the immortality of the soul is incapable of philosophic proof. Even in its highest forms soul-life is dependent on material conditions and its existence after the dissolution of the body cannot be demonstrated. There is no occasion moreover to criticize this conclusion on ethical grounds. On the contrary, man is obliged as well as capable of doing good without the hope of immortality; virtue is its own reward. This is the conclusion of the philosophy which is based on natural reason. But, according to Pomponazzi, the will may transcend reason: man can believe things which he is incapable of proving; faith proceeds from will, from personal impulse. By means of this separation between reason and will, between knowledge and faith, Pomponazzi conformed his theory with the authorized doctrines of the Church. He resorted to the same expedient in reconciling the reality of the human will with divine omnipotence. The Church rejected this distinction.

Nicolo da Machiavelli introduced the naturalistic method of investigation into politics and ethics in the same manner as Pomponazzi had revived the naturalistic psychology and ethics of genuine Aristotelianism. Descended from an old Florentine family (b. 1469), he entered the diplomatic service of the republican government of his native city which furnished him a splendid opportunity for studying men and affairs. After the fall of the Republic (1512) he joined the Medici, which brought him the pro-

found contempt of his fellow citizens, who refused to accept his services after the republican government was again restored. He died in 1527.—Political interest made him a thinker. The misfortunes of Italy and its consequent conditions inspired him with a desire to restore its ancient spirit and power. Why should we imitate the splendid arts of the ancients and neglect their splendid deeds? But the sole possibility of accomplishing anything great requires us to press forward to the realization of great ideals without scruple! There are passages (especially in his *Principe*) in which *Machiavelli* seems to regard the ideal which a man proposes as an indifferent matter, if he only pursues it unscrupulously and energetically. But in the background of his thought there was constantly but a single ideal; the unity and the greatness of Italy. He regarded everything right which would contribute towards the realization of this ideal. Finding the Italians of his age lacking in a proper appreciation of greatness, he attributes it to the softening influence of the Church and of Christianity. In his *Discorsi* (Dissertations on the first ten books of Livy) he draws comparisons between the mind of antiquity and that of his own age, thus laying the foundation for a comparative ethics which was highly unfavorable to the modern period. Honor, magnanimity and physical prowess are not sufficiently appreciated now, and this is due to the fact that Christianity places the ideal of humanity in a transcendent world. To *Machiavelli* it is perfectly clear that these attributes possess more than secondary value, they are intrinsically meritorious. *Machiavelli* reveals the true spirit of the Renaissance both by the purely human ideal which he presents to his fellow countrymen, as well as by his emulation of power for its own sake.

The spirit of the Renaissance was likewise manifest in France. *Michel de Montaigne* (1533-1592), a French nobleman, spent his life in his private castle in the neighborhood of Bordeaux, far removed from the great movements agitating his age, devoting himself to literary pursuits. His interest in a purely naturalistic interpretation of human life, as he knew it from travel, books and above all from introspection, reveals his thoroughly modern spirit. At the beginning of his essays (which appeared 1580-1588) he remarks; *je suis moy-mesme le sujet de mon livre*. Closer study however reveals the fact that it is the way in which nature manifests itself in his own life that really appeals to him. Nature, the great Mother of us all, reveals herself in a distinctively unique manner in every individual. Every human being has his *forme maistresse*, his ruling passion. It is this interest that accounts for *Montaigne's* own personal observations as well as for his thorough study of ancient literature. His enthusiasm for nature and his insight into the multiplicity of individual peculiarities cause him to revolt against all dogmatism, both the rationalistic and the theological. He opposes them both on the ground of the inexhaustible wealth of experience, which neither the faith of reason nor of dogma can satisfy. Our investigations constantly lead to the discovery of a greater number of differences and variations and thus increase the difficulty of reducing them to general laws. And we must remember, furthermore, that our knowledge of the objective world is through sense perception, and that the sense organs as a matter of fact only reveal their own state, not the real nature of objects. And finally, if we attempt to form a conception of Deity, we imagine Him in human form, just as animals would conceive Him in