THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN LIFE

AS VIEWED BY THE GREAT THINKERS FROM PLATO TO THE PRESENT TIME

BY

RUDOLF EUCKEN

PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF JENA;
AWARDED THE NOBEL PRIZE FOR LITERATURE IN 1908

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

BY

WILLISTON S. HOUGH

LATE PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY AND DEAN OF TEACHERS COLLEGE AT THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY; EDITOR OF THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF ERDMANN'S "HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY"

AND

W. R. BOYCE GIBSON

PROFESSOR OF MENTAL AND MORAL PHILOSOPHY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE; AUTHOR OF "RUDOLF EUCKEN'S PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE," "THE PROBLEM OF LOGIC," ETC.

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

IT is a genuine pleasure to me to see "The Problem of Human Life" in an English Version, particularly as the translation has been prepared with great care by esteemed friends, and is, I think, entirely successful.

The present book forms the essential complement of all my other works. It is designed to afford historical confirmation of the view that conceptions are determined by life, not life by conceptions. Under the guidance of this conviction the book traverses the whole spiritual development of the Western world, in the hope that the several phases of the development, and, above all, its great personalities, will be brought nearer to the personal experience of the reader than is customarily done. Particularly in an age of predominant specialisation, when the pursuit of learning too often endangers the completeness of living, such an endeavour is fully justified.

I hope that the English-speaking public will give the book a sympathetic reception. With their own thinkers, the problem of life has always stood in the foreground, and scientific research steadily regarded the whole life of man. Thus my book presents nothing foreign to the genius of the English-speaking peoples: may it be felt and welcomed by them as something kindred to their own aims!

RUDOLF EUCKEN.

Jena.

TRANSLATORS' PREFACE

THE following translation of Eucken's "Die Lebensanschauungen der grossen Denker: Eine Entwickelungsgeschichte des Lebensproblems der Menschheit von Plato bis zur Gegenwart" is based substantially upon the seventh German edition, Leipzig, 1907. But, owing to the rapidity with which the three last editions have succeeded the fifth, and to unavoidable interruptions of the work of translation, the above statement requires a word of explanation. The translation was begun from the fifth edition, and had progressed as far as the section on Origen, when the sixth edition appeared. This edition presented no changes, other than purely verbal ones, in the portion already translated, except in the account of Plato, particularly the important section on the Theory of Ideas. The passages affected were, of course, revised in accordance with the text of the new edition. The seventh edition being almost immediately called for, and Mr. Boyce Gibson having consented to undertake the translation of Part Third, the relatively extensive alterations and additions designed for this edition were communicated to the translators in MS. The new material, however, with but two or three exceptions, concerned only the portions not yet translated, and was accordingly readily incorporated into the text. The translation as it stands, therefore, is in all essential respects a version of the seventh German edition.[1]

But mention should be made of certain omissions from the text of the original in Parts First and Second. The author gave his ready assent to the exercise of a minor editorial privilege in this regard; and, solely with a view to condensation, a few para-

[1] See Publisher's Note.

graphs, and an occasional sentence or even phrase, particularly in the relatively long accounts of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, and Augustine, and in the section on Origen, have been omitted, entirely at the discretion of the first-named translator. No attempt has been made to indicate the points at which such omissions occurred; but their whole number would not aggregate more than a few pages.

The work of translation has been divided as follows, each translator being solely responsible for the portion undertaken by him. Parts First and Second, on Hellenism and on Christianity respectively, and the Author's Preface to the English Edition, have been translated by Mr. Hough; Part Third, on the Modern World, and the Introduction, have been translated by Mr. Gibson. It should be said, however, that nearly all of the first draft of those parts for which Mr. Gibson is responsible was made by his wife, and that her collaboration upon the whole work of this portion has been of the first importance. For the preparation of the Indexes the translators are further indebted to Mrs. Gibson, and, in part, to Mrs. Hough.

The translators have felt keenly the difficulty of deciding upon an English title for the work which would be wholly free from objection. The title finally adopted may at first appear to be a bold substitution; but familiarity with the work will make it clear that in reality it sounds the key-note of the book. If it be objected that the virtual transposition of the principal and the subordinate title of the original could only result in a change of emphasis, the reply is that this alternative was chosen as the least of many evils. It may be added that the author preferred the title adopted to any of the others proposed.

In preparing the English Version the translators have set accuracy before all else. They are, however, of opinion that fidelity is in general not to be secured by literal transcription. Moreover, since the present work is designed for the larger public as well as for academic uses, they have endeavoured to keep the diction as free as possible from technical expressions and from traces of German idiom. At the same time it should

be said that the style of the original, by virtue indeed of the very qualities which give it its distinction and individuality, presents certain difficulties which the translators cannot hope wholly to have surmounted; and, particularly in view of the distinguished recognition which the literary value of the author's work has recently received, they submit their translation to the public with no little diffidence.

In conclusion, the translators desire to express their obligations to Lady Welby, who kindly read Part First in MS., and made numerous valuable suggestions; to Professor Arthur C. McGiffert, who similarly read the MS. of Part Second, and gave it the benefit of his intimate knowledge of early Christianity; but particularly to the author, who not only read the entire translation in MS., but has throughout assisted the translators with advice on any points of unusual difficulty.

W. S. H.
W. R. B. G.

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

SINCE the publication of this translation of "The Problem of Human Life" in 1909, a number of later editions of the work have appeared in Germany. In order to embody in this new edition the changes and enlargements contained in the later German editions, Professor Eucken has written a series of supplementary notes to various chapters. These notes are grouped at the end of the volume in the form of appendices and are referred to by foot-notes on the pages to which the new material applies. Professor Eucken has also written especially for this new edition an important chapter on "The American View of Life." The translation of this new chapter and of the notes has been made by Archibald Alexander.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT does our life mean when viewed as a whole? What are the purposes it seeks to realise? What prospect of happiness does it hold out to us? To ask these questions is to set ourselves the Problem of Life, nor need we stay to justify our right to ask them. They force themselves on us to-day with resistless insistence. They are the cry of an age rent inwardly asunder, its heart at enmity with the work of its hands. The labour of the preceding centuries, nay, of the last few decades, has indeed been immeasurably fruitful. It has given birth to a new culture and to new views of the universe. But its triumphal progress has not implied a simultaneous advancement of the inward life; its dazzling victories have not been won for the spirit and substance of man. With relentless energy it has driven us more and more exclusively upon the world without us, subduing us to its necessities, pressing us more and more closely into the service of our environment. And the activities of our life ultimately determine our nature. If our powers are wholly concentrated on outward things and there is an ever-diminishing interest in the inner life, the soul inevitably suffers. Inflated with success, we yet find ourselves empty and poor. We have become the mere tools and instruments of an impersonal civilisation which first uses and then forsakes us, the victims of a power as pitiless as it is inhuman, which rides rough-shod over nations and individuals alike, ruthless of life or death, knowing neither plan nor reason, void of all love or care for man.

A movement of this nature, the disintegrating influences of which affect so closely the feelings and the convictions of the individual, cannot subsist long without reaction. In matters such as these, the problem is no sooner felt than the reaction

begins. Men cannot for long deny their spiritual nature and suppress all concern for its welfare. Their inner life holds its own against all pressure from without; it persists in relating all events to itself and summoning them for judgment before its own tribunal. Even opposition serves but to remind the Subject of the fundamental and inalienable rights of its own inwardness and freedom. So a slumbering giant needs only to be roused to the consciousness of his power to show himself superior to all the forces the world can bring against him. And when simultaneously with these changes an elemental passion for individuality of life and inner well-being asserts itself, when the rationality of existence, the salvation of the soul, become pressing, torturing problems, of a sudden the whole aspect of the world is transformed; that which was once held a sure possession now becomes a matter of painful perplexity and an object of weary search.

A regenerative movement of this kind is now in perceptible progress: and though the Powers of Mechanism still continue to extend their outward sway, our faith in them is shaken and the struggle against them has begun. Great movements are abroad to-day which, despite manifold differences of tendency, converge to a common issue. The passionate impetus of the social movement, the evidences of increasing religious earnestness, the ferment of artistic creation, all express one and the same desire, an ardour of longing for more happiness, for a fuller development of our human nature, for a new and a loftier order of life.

And yet, despite its progress, the movement is still in many respects very incomplete and chaotic. It is not only that certain of its side-currents variously intersect and frustrate each other; the main stream itself is a curious blend of higher and lower, nobility and meanness, youthful freshness and senile punctiliousness. Instead of seeking to transform his inward experience into an ordered cosmos and to strengthen freedom into law, the Subject is apt to measure his progress by the extent to which he can dispense with all authority, not excluding

that of his own nature. Breaking free from all restraint, he is borne aloft like some vain empty bubble, the plaything of wind and weather, and falls an easy prey to every kind of irrationality and folly. Thus we are conscious primarily of an atmosphere of ferment, restlessness, passion. We preserve our faith in the rationality of the movement only by treating it as a mere beginning and trusting that the spiritual necessity at work within it will in the end prevail over all individual illusions and conceits and build up the inward life on a systematic and well-ordered plan. To this end, however, our untiring co-operation is essential: we must sift and separate, clarify and deepen. Only through the strain of self-conflict can the Age truly realise itself, and accomplish its part in the evolution of the world's history.

Nor can Philosophy stand aloof from the struggle; she also has her part to play. Is she not pre-eminently fitted to give this movement a large and generous meaning, to clear it from confusion and direct it toward its ultimate goal? Her first duty indeed is to the present and to the problems of the day; nor is she at liberty to take refuge from present issues in a near or a distant past. Historical considerations are—for the philosopher—subsidiary; and yet, if he respects the limitations under which they can alone be of service to him, they may most effectively support his own personal conviction. We would then briefly consider the following view: that it is both possible and useful to represent to ourselves in a living way the various philosophies of life as they have taken shape in the minds of the great thinkers. For with this contention is bound up the whole success or failure of our present undertaking.

If these philosophies are to be of any help to us, we must give to the term "philosophy of life" a deeper meaning than it usually bears. We cannot interpret it as a set of select utterances on the subject of human life and destiny, or as a collection of occasional reflections and confessions. For such deliverances spring frequently from the mere mood of the moment, and serve to conceal rather than reveal the essential

quality of their author's thought. Moreover, shallow natures are not infrequently prodigal of confession—natures that have little that is worth confiding—while deeper souls are apt to withdraw their emotion from the public gaze, holding it sacred to the heart or bodying it forth only in their work.

No; we are not concerned with the reflections of these thinkers about life, but with life itself as it is fashioned forth in their world of thought. We ask what light they have thrown upon human existence, what place and purport they assign to it, how they combine its active with its passive functions; in a word, what is the character of human life as they conceive it? This question draws together the different threads of their thought and reveals to us the very depths of their soul. They become easy of access and of comprehension; they can make themselves known to us quite simply and speak in plain, straightforward fashion to all who will give them a hearing. Surely this quest offers strong inducement to every receptive mind. From the abundance of these great personalities must there not be some overflow of strength, something that will purify, ennoble, and level up our own endeavour?

Nor need we be troubled with the question whether these great thinkers supply everything that is essential and valuable in human achievement. We can at least say that they constitute the soul of it. For true creative work, the upbuilding of a realm of spiritual meanings and values, is not the product of mediocrity, but arises rather out of a direct antagonism to all that is petty and small in human affairs. On the lower level, spiritual activity is much too closely blent with alien and inferior elements, too solely at the disposal of small-minded aims, for it to be capable of producing any clearly defined and distinctive conceptions of life. At all periods, it has been only the few who have possessed the greatness of mind, the inward freedom, the constructive power which alone make it possible to pursue the path of creative activity as an end in itself, to wrest unity from chaos, to win through the stress and strain of true creative work that glad and sure self-confidence without

which thought has no stability and work no profit. This, however, does not mean that the creative genius is independent of his social and historical environment. Even that which is greatest has its necessary presuppositions and conditions. The soil must be ready, the age must contribute the stimulus of its special problems, enthusiasm must be trained to willing service. To this limited extent a genius is but the ripe expression of his epoch, and the luminous idea only serves to intensify aspirations already alive in the community. But none the less does the great man lift the common life to an essentially higher plane. He does not merely unify existing tendencies, but brings about an inner transformation: he ennobles the whole message of the age. For it is he who first clearly distinguishes the spiritual from the merely human, the eternal from the temporal, who first gives to life an independent worth, a value of its own, who first attains to the conception of universal and imperishable truth. In so far as the Eternal can be apprehended under time conditions, it is so apprehended by the great man; it is he who first frees it from its temporal setting to become a possession for all time. If then the creative geniuses of humanity are the true foci of all spiritual life, if in them its rays, else scattered, are concentrated to burn thereafter with an intensified, inextinguishable flame that in turn reillumines the whole,—then surely we may take comfort and rest assured that in studying the work of such men we are touching the very pulse of all creative activity.

And the same reason that makes it worth our while to study them individually renders it equally advisable to consider carefully the relations of each to his contemporaries and successors. In the contemplation of these various types we become more distinctly and vividly aware of the different schemes of life open to us. The extremes between which we ordinarily oscillate are here set forth in most palpable form, and help to explain each other while defining their own positions ever more clearly. But as the ages pass and one set of conditions is replaced by another, there is a tendency for the permanent to

become confused with the transitory. On the one hand, our multiplicity of systems seems to admit of reduction to a limited number of simple types, which, like the motifs of a tune, constantly recur through all changes of environment, and yet we perceive at the same time a steady progress, a constant influx of what is new. Life and the world open out in ever-broadening vistas. Problems of increasing difficulty arise; the current flows swifter and stronger. The whole detailed story would be needed to show us what this movement has achieved for us. We may not forestall the conclusion by any hasty generalising. So much, however, we may say, that if at first the history of philosophy seem like a battle in which every man's hand is against his fellow, in which the leaders are so engrossed with the development of their own individuality that they repel rather than attract each other, yet we must not on this account despair of unity and progress. One doctrine defies another only so long as the respective systems are regarded in the light of finished results and the intellect is called upon to be the sole and final arbiter of every question. Now it is precisely from such inadequate conceptions that this study of ours can rescue us. When we ask how our great thinkers looked at life, we see that their thought had its source in the depths of the life-process itself, that its course is determined by certain vital needs, that it is but the expression of an inward struggle toward truth and happiness and spirituality. On the larger plane of this life-process many things help and supplement each other which in the more narrow and definite region of conceptual thinking are frankly antagonistic. It were even possible that all divisions should be included within one general progressive movement, and that in the friction of one mind with another we should find the true seat of creative activity. Now the principal phases of this movement are given us by the great thinkers, if we but pierce to the heart of their endeavour. It is under their guidance that we may be led from a remote past to the very threshold of our own day. It is they who can make the past live again for us, put us in possession of all that human

effort has achieved, and transplant us from a present of mere immediacy into a present that transcends our time-experience. It is this wider, more significant present that we so sorely need to-day; we need it to counteract the rush and hurry of everyday life, the narrowness of party spirit, the looseness of prevalent standards. Surely in fighting these things we do well to summon to our aid the life-work of the great thinkers.

But, with all its attractions, the undertaking is fraught with difficulties of no ordinary kind. Can we bring the object of our study close to us, can we enter into sympathetic communion with him, and yet observe the necessary amount of objectivity in our treatment? The answer must depend on what we mean by objectivity. What we certainly do *not* want is an objectivity which fights shy of all subjective verdicts; for such objective treatment, no matter how exact and thorough, can do no more than collect and arrange the data, and if it gives even a passable presentation of its object, it only does so inadvertently by filling in the gaps with merely conventional appreciations. No! At every moment our task compels us to judge for ourselves, to classify and divide, to sift and to separate. This is true even as regards such relatively external matters as the choice of material; much more do we need to exercise independence of judgment if we would penetrate to the unity which underlies and dominates the most varied forms of expression, if we would share the inward experiences of the great men whom we study, and recognise that they are organically related to each other and linked together in one unbroken sequence. And yet, whilst we discountenance an unspiritual objectivity, it must not be supposed that we give ourselves over to an unbridled subjectivity. It cannot be right for us to interpret the personality we are studying in the light of our subjective preferences, or develop his meaning only in so far as he seems to confirm our previous convictions. Such a procedure would never allow us to penetrate to his real self; still less would it acquaint us with the inner currents of human progress, or conduce to that larger thought and wider horizon which we hope to gain through our

inquiry. We conclude, then, that while striving to get into close contact with each thinker, we must yet not obtrude ourselves too far. We must allow him to speak for himself and to make good his own position. Our final verdict must not be the result of individual reflection; it must be reached through a vivid portrayal of the man himself and of the influence he has exercised on the world at large. Nothing should be to us more vitally important than the endeavour to re-establish a direct relation between reader and Thinker. That such an undertaking implies at the same time an independent stand-point, particularly in relation to the Philosophy of History, will be at once obvious to all who are familiar with such questions.

Other difficulties arise out of our relationship to learned specialisation. We have no quarrel with specialisation in itself. For not only does the very growth of detailed inquiry call for the syntheses that shall gather the detail together; these more comprehensive pictures themselves gain their richness from the detail. The more exact our information as to the relation of the Thinker to his historical and social environment, the more skilful the analysis of his work into its component threads, the more clear-cut and vivid will the outlines of our picture become. A quarrel becomes inevitable only when the specialist brooks no other work than his, when he thinks his apparatus sufficient to fathom the whole personality, when he tries to explain greatness as the accumulated result of infinitesimal accretions; for what really makes the Thinker great is that which transcends mere historical explanation: it is the power of original creation, the Unity which animates and illumines everything from within. And to this, mere learning and criticism are necessarily blind. It reveals itself only to an Intuition whose mode of apprehension is sympathetically creative. It is even possible that the merely learned study of a personality may remove us further from him, by interposing between the spectator and the object something that claims attention for itself, thus disturbing the total impression. Let us beware then of confusing accidentals with essentials, means

with ends; of overlooking ideas in our anxiety about facts, and making original research do duty for spiritual intuition.

We are bound, in entering upon the present work, to observe the utmost care and caution. But we must not let the difficulties daunt us and cloud the joy with which we embark upon our task. Despite all perplexities, there is a quite peculiar charm—and profit, too, shall we add—in trying to understand how the great thinkers looked at life. The deep yearning for truth and happiness which breathes from all their writings carries us away by its intensity; and yet there is something magically soothing and strengthening in the mature works into which such yearnings have been crystallised. Different though our own conviction may be, we rejoice none the less in the victories of creative genius and the transparent lucidity of its productions. Our culture is constantly bringing us into close touch with these master-minds; our work is linked with theirs by a myriad threads. Yet, closely as they concern us, their personality as a whole is often strangely unfamiliar; there may be an utter absence of any real intimacy between us and them. We gaze into the Pantheon from without, but the gods do not descend from their lofty pedestals to share our trials and sorrows, nor do they even seem to be fellow-workers with each other. How different when we turn to the inner sources of their creative activity, when we penetrate to those deep regions of the spirit in which their work reveals itself as the expression and assertion of their true nature. The frozen forms then warm into life and begin to speak to us. We see them impelled by the same problems which determine our own weal and woe. We also see them linked together as workers in one common task: the task of building up a spiritual world within the realm of human life, of proving our existence to be both spiritual and rational. The walls of division break down at last, and we pass into the Pantheon as into a world that belongs to us, as into our own spiritual home.