

THE PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY

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The problems of philosophy by Harald Høffding & Galen M. Fisher & William James

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HARALD HØFFDING & GALEN M. FISHER & WILLIAM JAMES

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BY

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PREFACE

PROFESSOR HÖFFDING of Copenhagen is one of the wisest, as well as one of the most learned of living philosophers. His "Psychology," his "Ethics," and his "History of Modern Philosophy" have made his name known and respected among English readers, though his admirable "Philosophy of Religion" still calls for a translator. The following little work is, so to speak, his philosophical testament. In it he sums up in an extraordinarily compact and pithy form the result of his lifelong reflections on the deepest alternatives of philosophical opinion. The work, to my mind, is so pregnant and its conclusions so sensible — or at least so in accordance with what I regard as sensible — that I have had it translated as a contribution to the education of our English-reading students.

Rationalism in philosophy proceeds from the whole to its parts, and maintains that the connection between facts must at bottom be intimate and not external: the universe is a Unit, and the parts of Being must be interlocked continuously. Empiricism, on the other hand, goes from parts to whole, and is willing to allow that in the end some parts may be merely added to others, and that what the word 'and' stands for may be a part of real Being as well as of speech. For radical rationalism, Reality in itself is eternally complete, and the confusions of experience are our illusion. For radical empiricism, confusion may be a category of the Real itself, and "ever not quite" a permanent result of our attempts at thinking it out straighter. Professors of Philosophy are almost always rationalists; and the student, passing from the street into their lecture-rooms, usually finds a world presented to him, so abstract, pure, and logical, and perfect, that it is hard for him to see in it any resemblance of char-

acter to the struggling and disjointed sum of muddy facts which he has left behind him, outside.

Now the peculiarity of Professor Höfding is that whereas he has the *manner* of a rationalistic professor of Philosophy, being as abstract and technical in his style of exposition as any one can wish, his results, nevertheless, keep in touch with the temperament of concrete reality, and he allows that 'ever not quite' may be the last word of our attempts at understanding life rationally.

The word 'rationally' here denotes certain definite connections which Professor Höfding also sums up under the name of 'continuities.' He opposes to them the notion of the 'irrational,' as that residuum of crude or 'alogical' fact, '*mere*' fact, that may remain over when our attempts to establish logical continuity among things have reached their limit. The conjunction 'and' would be the only bond here between the continuous and the irrational portion

of Reality. Professor Höffding is in short an empiricist and pluralist, although he prefers to call himself a 'critical Monist.' He means by the word 'critical,' here, to indicate that the continuity and unity of Reality are at no time complete, but may be yet in process of completion. Our thought, which is itself a part of Reality, is surely incomplete; but in endeavoring to make itself ever more continuous and to see the world as ever more rational, it works in the direction of more continuity; and the whole of Creation may analogously be in travail to get itself into an ever more continuous and rational form.

Empiricist matter presented in a rationalist's manner — this to my mind gives their distinction to the pages that follow. They form a *multum in parvo* so well calculated to impress and influence the usual rationalistic-minded student of philosophy, that I put them forth in English for his benefit.

It takes, I confess, some little knowledge

of philosophic literature to appreciate the far-reaching significance of some of our author's paragraphs, and to distribute emphasis properly among them. They are too brief and abstract for the unguided beginner. For his benefit let me barely indicate some of the book's positions which seem to me particularly noteworthy.

I have spoken of the notion that since the world is incomplete anyhow, so far as our thought goes, it may also in other ways be only approaching perfection. Perfection, in other words, may not be eternal; rather are things working toward it as an ideal; and God himself may be one of the co-workers. Time, on this view, must be real, and cannot, Professor Höfding says, be banished, as ultra-rationalists pretend, from absolute reality.

With this general position goes what our author calls the 'dynamic' notion of Truth, as opposed to the 'static' notion. I should interpret this as equivalent to saying that 'knowledge' is a relation of our thinking