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.
Preface

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 Höffding 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 Höffding 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 Hööfding 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 Höfdding 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
activities to reality, and that those activities are ‘truest’ which work best—the term ‘work’ being taken in the widest possible number of senses. Thought is thus an instrument of adaptation to, and eventually of modification of, its objects. Its duty may, but need not always, be merely to copy the latter. In all this, Professor Höffding aligns himself with the ‘economical’ school of scientific logicians, and (if I mistake not) with the recent ‘humanistic’ and ‘pragmatistic’ literature of our own language.

Professor Höffding’s ‘critical’ (as opposed to absolute) Monism means that although you cannot exhaustively account for any item of fact by referring to the whole of which it is a member, yet so much of what we call a fact consists of its relations to other facts, that we are equally unable to see any fact as wholly independent. The part in itself remains for us an abstraction, and from a whole which itself is for us a mere ideal. Neither is given in
experience, nor can either be adequately supplied by our reason; so that, both above and below, thought fails to continue, and terminates against an 'irrational.' This in the end may mean that Being is really incomplete, in any sense in which our logic apprehends completeness.

No one better than Professor Höfpron in these pages has shown how all our attempted definitions of the Whole of things, are made by conceiving it as analogous in constitution to some one of its parts which we treat as a type-phenomenon. No one has traced better the logical limitations of this sort of speculation. We never can absolutely prove its validity. We can only paint our more or less plausible pictures; and philosophy thus must always be something of an art as well as of a science.

The fundamental type-phenomenon is the fact that we can, to some degree at any rate, make things mentally intelligible. Being and our mental forms are thus not incongruent. And as our mental forms
act in us as unifying forces, so we must suppose that the energy in Being that tends toward unity *in the thought-part of Being*, tends, by analogy, toward unity elsewhere also. This puts Professor Höffding in a general attitude of harmony with idealistic ways of thinking. But he still insists that Being can never be expressed in thought without some blind remainder.

In Ethics the same antinomy or conflict between part and whole occurs which we find in the other problems. The single act or agent must have independent value, yet must also be a means toward farther values. Neither from any whole or any parts concretely given can we deduce a continuous ethical system. Such a system is still a vacant abstraction; and both in Being and in concrete thinking the kingdom of goods must be regarded as still engaged in the making.

Our author’s conception of religion is one of his best strokes, in my opinion. He defines it as a belief in the ultimate ‘con-
ser\v ontion of values,' or rather of what has value. This seems to me to cover more facts in the concrete history of human religions than any definition with which I am acquainted. Yet one easily sees how experience may change our ideas of what the most genuinely ideal values are; so the 'philosophy' of religion, less than any other philosophy perhaps, is entitled to become dogmatic. The belief in the conservation of values has itself a value, for it can give an energy to life. Being so vital a function, it will always be sure to find some form for itself functionally equivalent to the religions of the past, whether that form be called by the name of religion, or be called by some other name.

An unfinished world then, with all Creation, along with our thought, struggling into more continuous and better shape—such is our author's general view of the matter of Philosophy. I have doubtless emphasized the points that appealed most to my own personal interests. Others—and there
are many which are fundamental—I must leave the reader to find out. I need only add that I have carefully revised the translation, and that (though it may not be elegant) it is, I believe, faithful to the author’s meaning throughout.

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