

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by EDWARD C. HEGELE

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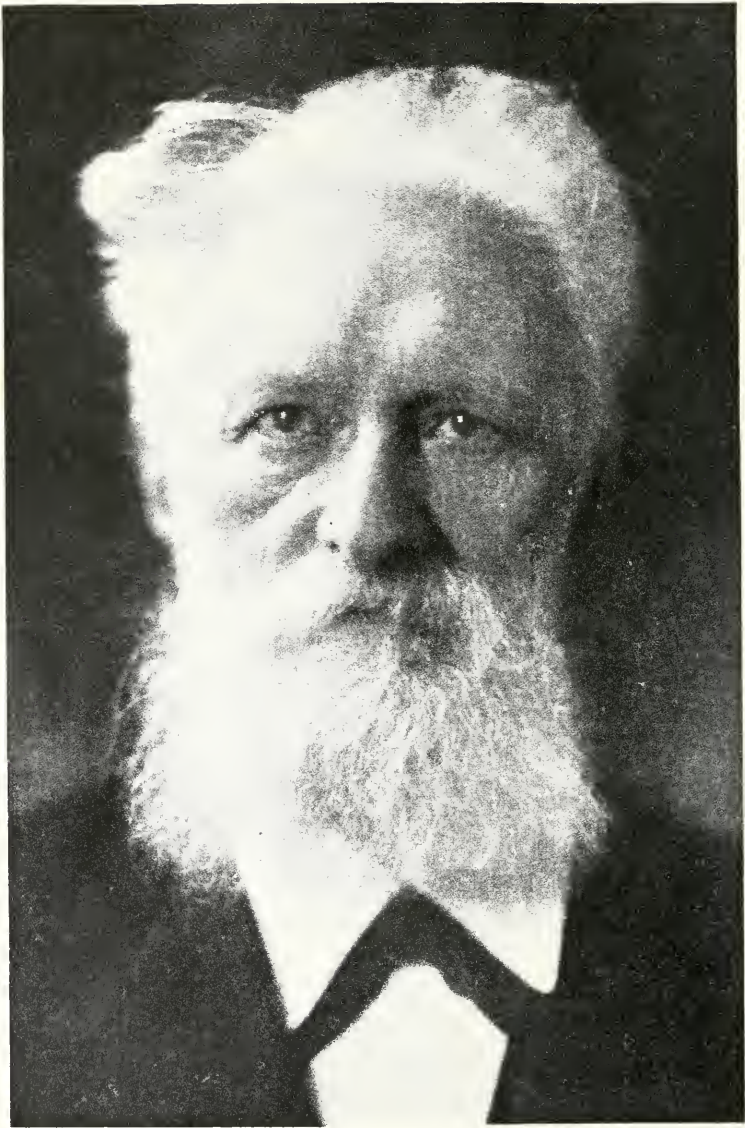
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Rudolf Eucken

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RUDOLPH EUCKEN¹

BY GIOVANNI PAPINI

[Note: The following paper is from Papini's 24 *Cervelli* ("Four and Twenty Minds"), published in 1912, before the author's conversion to Catholicism. It is one of the papers not included in Professor Wilkins' book of Papini translations.]

WHEN, a short while ago, a swarm of news dispatches announced among the list of Nobel prize-wimmers, a name deformed by German syllables, followed by the word Jena, certain Italian newspapers, better versed in matters of crime than in the history of philosophy, at once leaped to the conclusion that the fortunate recipient-to-be of one of these annual cheques was none other than the celebrated Ernest Haeckel, who also resided in Jena. However, better informed journals and more intelligent persons understood at once that the savant in question was not the evolutionistic pope.

It is possible also that down there in Jena they would have been better satisfied if the prize had been awarded to Haeckel instead of to Eucken. The contemporary history of the little university town is well known but interesting. Behind its walls dwelt three great men. The first, Haeckel, is the patron saint of the city. There is a *Haeckelstrasse*, and the tobacco shops carry cigar boxes displaying a large bearded face, with the energetically satisfied inscription, *Unser Haeckel!* beneath it. The second, Eucken, is known after a fashion, and while he has many friends and acquaintances, it might be said that his good fortune had made him known for the first time to a number of his fellow townsmen. The third, Frege, is absolutely unknown, in Jena and out, although he is, perhaps, the most original of the three. He is a modest mathematician, inventor of a logical symbolism, and, in many respects, worthy of a place beside our own Peano. There are not ten persons in Europe, possibly, who have

¹ Translated from the Italian by Samuel Putnam.

read and understood his works, but that detracts nothing from his glory. Now, however, the great European public knows that there exists a philosopher by the name of Eucken, and everybody wants to know what sort of man he is. The life of Eucken has in it nothing of the extraordinary. It is the life of a diligent professor, of a laborious writer, and of the faithful father of a family.

Rudolph Christian Eucken was born in Aurich, East Frisia, January 5, 1846. He studied at the university of Goettingen from 1863 to 1867; from 1867 to 1871, he taught in a gymnasium. In 1871, he received a call as professor ordinarius of philosophy at Basilea, and there he found himself in the company of Buckhardt and Nietzsche. These latter, however, as the celebrated editor, Diedrichs, another of Jena's glories, assures me, did not attach much importance to the young professor and took no notice of him, possibly for the reason that he did not possess, in their eyes, sufficient *persönlichkeit*. From 1874, he taught at Jena, and from then on he never moved from that place.

When it is added that Eucken has a wife who is a great admirer of her husband, that he has several sons and many friends, practically all the necessary information about his life has been given.

The philosophic life of Eucken, on the other hand, has been quite an adventurous one. As a youth, through his masters, Trendelenburg and Reuter, he underwent the influence of Hegel, an influence which was never effaced. A little later, however, his own true masters were Plato and Fichte, and to them he owes that vivid sense of the reality of the spirit which fills his eloquent pages.

He began, as so many others have done, with history, with certain studies in the method of Aristotle, with certain thorough researches in philosophic terminology, with certain acute observations on images and tests in philosophy, and with a series of studies on the old German philosophers. His leading work, the *Lebensanschauungen der grossen Denker*, is a species of philosophic history from Plato to Nietzsche, the whole viewed through the medium of his own novel idealism.

But Eucken, with the soul of an apostle and a moralist, could not remain in the field of history, even though it was history made to his order, and for twenty-three years he continued to expound, in books large and small, a group of ideas on life and the world and, above all, his conception of an independent spiritual life, towards the development of which he believed mankind must tend and labor.

He began, in 1878 with his *Grundbegriffe der Gegenwart* (Fun-

damental Concepts of the Present Time), which then became the *Geistige Strömungen der Gegenwart* (The Spiritual Currents of the Present Time), in which, already, the central motives of his ideology were recognizable; and in a few days, the *Einführung in eine Philosophie des Geisteslebens* (Introduction to a Philosophy of the Spiritual Life) appeared, in which the same motives are to be found again, with certain variations imposed by time. His most famous work, *Life Visions of Great Thinkers*, is not the one best suited to convey an idea of Eucken's genius. In it he is too critical, too preoccupied with the idea of showing the contradictions between other philosophers, and, to tell the truth, a little tedious, though the spirit of Eucken is naturally an enthusiastic, optimistic, and spontaneous one.

Eucken has written a great many books, but it is not to be assumed, for this reason, that he has put forth a large number of ideas. Some of his books are revisions of his earlier ones; others are repetitions, developments, amplifications and sometimes, it is to be regretted, dilutions of ideas which have been put forth by him ten and a hundred times before. He is fond of eloquence; he exhibits a tendency to moral sermonizing; and he draws out his thoughts a little as if they were symphonic themes. For this reason, in reading his works, one has an impression; if not of distasteful obscurity, certainly of prolixity; and perhaps, one who has read one of his books may be said to know Eucken as well as one who has read them all.

There should be no need, on the other hand, of drawing the unkind conclusion that this extensive literary output of Eucken is the result of an inordinate desire for money or fame; he has in himself a need to expand, to communicate his thought, to make known and accepted that which he believes to be true; and for this reason, he seems never to have been able to repeat any one idea often enough or to expound it with sufficient lucidity.

His philosophy, on account of this oratorical, poetic, propagandistic character, is not easily summed up. That with which Eucken is most preoccupied is life—with the manner in which we ought to live. Spiritual divisions grieve him, and he believes that metaphysical as well as moral salvation lies in unity. This unity is not to be found in the philosophers, who are perpetually in contradiction to one another; it is not to be found in the various conceptions of life which have been given us from time to time. It can only be realized in a deeper and fuller spiritual life.

One of the most important ideas of Eucken is that man, from a purely natural being, tends always to become a spiritual being, and that we have the right to speak of an *autonomous* spiritual life, one independent, that is to say, of the other vital and social functions, and one which ought ever to extend its dominion more and more. But we are not to be content with hoping that this spiritual life will be extended and deepened. We must coöperate more and more in the coming of its kingdom. We must *act* in order to aid it, and not content ourselves merely with contemplation. "This life in its orderly development," he says in one of his most recent books, "receives its coloring and its special tone by putting forth, above all, the fact that we do not belong by simple right of birth to a reasonable world, capable of being primarily reduced to contemplation and pleasure, but that it is necessary for us to hurl ourselves forth with energy against this world, and that for this reason there must be a revolution of present conditions." (*Grundlinien einer neuen Lebensanschauung*, Leipzig, Veit, 1907, p. 210.)

The philosopher, then, must not merely *know* the world; he must *change* it, as well. For this reason, he has ultimately given to his philosophy the name of *activism*, and for the same reason, that philosophy has been connected with the famous pragmatism, which has created so great a stir in America and in Europe in recent years. But Eucken holds us to an accurate distinction between his activism and pragmatism, and he has a right to do so, since he is more akin to the two masters of French spiritualism, Ravaisson and Boutroux, than he is to either James or Schiller.

To Boutroux he bears a special resemblance on account of the great importance which he attaches to religious questions. Many of his volumes treat of religion, and not everybody knows, perhaps, that in Germany he is one of those who have followed with the most intelligent attention the Franco-Italian modernistic movement.

With respect, however, to the religions of the past, as with respect to their philosophies, he preserves the attitude of a critic. No church truly can call him her follower, as no philosophy can call him its disciple. He is constantly in search of something which shall be at one and the same time a perfect religion and a perfect state of knowledge, of action and of contemplation. He has in himself the "torment for unity," and yet, he is constrained to recognize the dualism which is in all thought and the fact that thought must continually triumph. And so the contradictions which he finds in others are to be found also in himself. For Eucken, the great philosophers

are those seekers who have glimpsed little by little something of the truth; the great revealers of religion are the experimenters who prepare the way for the unknown God to come. But is there not something of this in Eucken himself? He also, a modern and therefore a dolorously contradictory spirit, finds himself caught in a dilemma from which all his beautiful phrases on the spiritual life are powerless to extricate him. He, as a religious soul, aspires to a union with God; as a prophet of the kingdom of the spirit, he believes in the coming of the Man-God; and for this reason, if he were consistent, he ought not to philosophize at all, he ought not to write books, but ought rather to live and to assist others to live in a manner progressively more noble. If the spirit is activity, as Eucken is always repeating, metaphysics has no further cause for being. The great problem is to know what to do, and philosophy is thus reduced to a moral issue. Eucken, often as he has combatted intellectualism, has not had the courage to lay aside the pursuit of knowledge; and so, in all his works, a contrast is to be perceived between a mystic spirit, tending to pure interior action, and an old-style philosophic mind, which cannot detach itself entirely from intellectualistic predilections. With a philosophic predication, he attempts to dissipate the contrast, but it is not possible. And for this reason, Eucken, while he is today a valuable worker in the field of spiritual education, will not be found among those who have given to humanity a new and decisive word.