

Rudolf Eucken and the Education Question.

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AT the centre of Rudolf Eucken's philosophy lies the firm belief that what man really needs is not a new environment, or even a new set of opinions, but a new life. Eucken is deeply convinced that there can be no genuine progress and no real elevation of humanity save through a re-birth of the spirit. A mere re-arrangement of life which takes the natural man as he is and builds upon that foundation can never prove adequate. It is essential that a new spiritual power should enter into man and compel his obedience and reverence.

Modern science has created a picture of the universe in which there is no room for man as anything more than a fragment of nature, a mere higher animal : it does not see in man anything essentially new, as compared with the rest of the universe. The higher faculties of humanity—feeling, imagination, intuition, will, moral sensibility, and so on—are all classed as developments of primitive animal instincts. Man is looked upon purely and simply as an outgrowth of the material world. There is no recognition of the soul as a reality, no room for belief in a future life, and no opportunity for the exercise of moral and spiritual freedom. This point of view is still steadily gaining ground amongst the less educated classes, although, as is well known, it has suffered a severe set-back of recent years in the academic world.

The world-wide influence and popularity of Eucken and Bergson clearly shows how extensive is the reaction against the materialistic view of life, and how eagerly humanity desires something beyond it. Both philosophers present a picture of the universe which, in opposition to that I have outlined above, sets man free from the bondage of scientific determinism and opens the door to the recognition of spiritual religion.

The German thinker's method is one of elimination. One by one he examines the various attempts at a synthesis of life

with which the thought of the day provides us; one by one they are found to be incomplete or to be involved in inner contradictions. In each case, however, it is seen that the recognition of *an independent spiritual life* would remedy the incompleteness or remove the contradictions. Eucken thus regards the spiritual life as nothing less than a necessity. Through its recognition alone can we explain the actual content of the universe as we know it. The spiritual life, as understood by the great Jena philosopher, is a living, personal, and self-active principle at the core of the universe. This life is more primary than matter itself, and is the most central and positive reality of which we can have any knowledge. It is not derived from any natural basis, and is not a product of evolution. The foundation of truth and knowledge, it is cosmic, absolute and eternal.

The spiritual life is at one and the same time transcendent and immanent. It is superior to man and independent of him. Yet it dwells within man and forms the centre of his being. In an external sense man may be natural, but in an internal sense he is spiritual. It is the spiritual life within him which distinguishes man from the animals and forms the root of his unique unifying capacity, as well as of his ethical and religious nature. We attain to our spiritual selves, says Eucken, by rising above our human and natural selves. Here we find a strength greater than our own. This inward elevation is not to be attained without difficulty and struggle. We cannot participate in the cosmic spiritual life, thus finding our own true selves, without continual and *active* effort; hence the name *Activism*, which Eucken has assigned to his type of thought.

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With an apology for this somewhat digressive, and yet, I think, very necessary preface, I will go on to the subject of the present little sketch. The spirit of uncertainty that permeates the society of to-day makes its influence felt in every department of life; if the Churches cannot escape it, neither can the schoolroom. The old ideals and methods have largely passed

away from the schools, and such a host of new ones have been suggested that the teachers know not where to turn between so many prophets. There is certainly no lack of educational energy, while on every hand we hear talk of educational reform. But there is no guiding, positive ideal. We lack a definite, generally recognized ethic, and in its absence we cannot hope for any abiding settlement of the educational problem, in spite of all our enthusiasm. In his whimsical way, Mr. G. K. Chesterton has put the situation in a nutshell: "He (*i.e.*, the modern man) says, 'Neither in religion nor morality, my friend, lie the hopes of the race, but in education.' This, clearly expressed, means, 'We cannot decide what is good, but let us give it to our children!'" This belief that the problem of education depends upon the wider questions of ethics, philosophy, and religion, that we must know our own position with regard to the great questions of the universe before we can bring up our children in the way they should go, is entirely shared by Eucken, who has stated that the educational work of the modern world is endangered by the lack of a "securely established conviction concerning life as a whole."

Of great interest to us is the question whether (as is so widely maintained) education can be put upon a neutral basis—that is, a basis free from definite metaphysical conviction, or whether it must be connected with such conviction. This is practically identical, since the first object of education must be the development of moral character, with the question: Is morality independent of metaphysics and religious belief? Upon the latter point, Eucken leaves us in no doubt as to his position; on p. 389 of "Main Currents of Modern Thought" we read: "No matter from what side we regard it, morality involves the demand for a new world. It brings with it a reversal of the first appearance of things, and is therefore metaphysical. Hence by having recourse to morality, we do not rid ourselves of metaphysics. If we are really earnest in keeping morality free from all metaphysics, we unavoidably reduce it to a state of lamentable superficiality."

Eucken has not, as yet, written much which bears directly on the question of education ; but it is by no means difficult to perceive the nature of the influence which his philosophy as a whole must exert upon the development of educational work. For example, with regard to the matter of the moral basis, his influence must tell strongly against all attempts to base moral training solely upon a utilitarian foundation (training for "good citizenship," for "social duty," etc.), since his whole conviction is a protest against "this worldliness," against every sort of merely humanistic civilization. According to the activistic philosophy, the essence of morality is the re-birth of the individual into a new world of eternal, spiritual values. It thus indissolubly links together morality and religion.

The great Jena philosopher's view of man's nature leads to valuable pedagogical consequences. If man be regarded as a purely material being, and his soul as a mere product of natural growth, education must direct itself towards the development of natural faculties alone ; its highest aim will be the harmonious adjustment of these faculties to the environment and to society in general. There will be no recognition of an inner depth within man's soul, of a struggle between the lower and the higher man. Personal development will become a quiet, harmonious growth, like that of a flower from its parent plant. Here is no room for the ancient Christian conflict between spirit and flesh. Here is no truth higher than that revealed by sensuous perception. But if, as Eucken would assert, man is a being living in the natural world, yet partaker in a higher world of spiritual reality, the whole matter takes on an entirely different aspect. The central task of education now becomes the awakening of the moral and spiritual nature, and its establishment in a position of independence in the face of all those merely human and selfish instincts which act as a constant downward drag.

This brings us by a natural transition to one of the most important and much-discussed questions of present-day psychology and pedagogy—the problem of *personality*. The develop-

ment of a true personality (in a sense sharply to be distinguished from the cheap popular cult of personality) is one of the chief concerns of the ethico-religious philosophy of Rudolf Eucken. In this connection Eucken comes forward as an opponent of the modern tendency to a weak, subjective individualism. He protests against the current theories of "self-expansion" and "self-development," with their rejection of definite standards of conduct and their glorification of egoism. In direct opposition to this trend of thought, he appeals to the Christian truth (now often forgotten, even in religious circles) that the highest development of self demands the forgetfulness of self. A true personality demands the death of the natural man: "We are concerned not with the development or adornment of the natural self, but with the gaining of a new self."

In "Life's Basis and Life's Ideal," attention is called to the overwhelming wealth of subjects with which the modern educator is confronted: English, French, German, Latin, Greek, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, History, Geography, Art, Music, Handwork (in several forms), Gardening, Games, Military Training, and finally Moral and Religious Instruction—all these, and possibly others which have escaped my mind at the moment, are looked upon as almost essential; and yet how impossible it is that they can all be adequately taught! To make a proper selection and to determine what is really primary and what secondary, it is absolutely essential that we should possess some definite central principles by which to guide ourselves. Unfortunately, as Eucken says, "we do not possess enough life of our own of a definite character to be able to test and sort, to clarify and deepen, that which is presented to us." Hence the wretched chaos of our present system.

A few paragraphs of "Main Currents of Modern Thought" are devoted to pointing out some of the chief dangers which threaten our modern educational work. Eucken refers in the first place to the steadily increasing tendency to reject all authority and discipline. This is a feature of the life of to-day which is by no means confined to the educational world, and is

perhaps most marked in the Anglo-Saxon countries. It goes hand in hand with the spread of materialism, and is a necessary corollary of the new Anglo-Saxon gospel as expressed in the phrase "Let's have a good time!"¹

Further, our philosopher takes a strong line in opposition to the modern cult of equality, merely as such, and apart from a recognition of definite spiritual values. He says ("Main Currents of Modern Thought," p. 360): "This sort of worship of equality will inevitably cause civilization to become flaccid and colourless, to avoid everything powerful and all clearly-defined individuality, as it would avoid evil or error; and what is still worse, it will cause it to lose that which, according to Goethe's saying, 'nobody brings with him into the world, yet which is all-important if a man is to become a *whole* man'—veneration." While dealing with this false levelling, Eucken takes the opportunity of criticizing a mistaken development in the women's movement—namely, the endeavour to obtain for women, not that which best corresponds with their own specific nature and spiritual needs, not merely their due rights, but that which men possess, simply because it is possessed by men; it is thus sought to obliterate a distinction which, rightly interpreted, brings with it a deep enrichment of life and civilisation.² In this connection, I should like to quote Professor Harnack, whose opinions seem closely to correspond to those of the Jena professor: "I do not admit the conclusion that women's education must be modelled exactly on the lines selected for the education of men, or that society is in a healthy state when women are competing with men in every sphere of action. . . . To the eyes of all but the wilfully blind, it has, in any case, long ago been clear that woman is physically less fitted than

¹ While this article was in the Press, I was informed that Professor Eucken has become a Vice-President of the Duty and Discipline Movement (117, Victoria Street, S.W.), an organization which exists to combat juvenile indiscipline.

² These remarks should not be understood as applying especially to the suffrage question, as I have no reason to suppose Eucken had this in mind. He is referring, in particular, to the importance of preserving true natural distinctions.

man for a number of occupations. The difficult task that lies before us is to determine what professions are suitable for women, and to see that these are undertaken only under such conditions as are adapted to the mental and physical organization of the sex. This task is but newly commenced, and until it is accomplished, there will be a constant sacrifice of valuable human lives" ("Essays on the Social Gospel," p. 129).

Goethe once wrote: "Whatever liberates our intelligence, without at the same time giving us self-control, is fatal." This saying, brief as it is, carries within itself a whole philosophy of education. It is the expression of a truth which is to-day lamentably neglected. Modern education (especially, of course, if purely secular) produces a type of man whose intellect is not restrained, complemented, and balanced by other portions of his nature. In such cases the intellect attains a kind of false independence; it works out of harmony with the higher qualities of the soul. The education of to-day, instead of promoting, as it should, individual and social wholeness, simply acts disruptively by turning out thousands upon thousands of young men and women whose intellects have been aroused to action, but who have not learnt that deeper wisdom expressed by Pascal in the phrase, "The highest use of the intellect is to discover its own limitations," and who are therefore intelligent enough to be critical of all the moral and spiritual fare which may be offered to them, but not wise enough to realize the need for an authority higher than the individual reason. As a well-known German psychologist (Dr. F. W. Foerster) has written (in his book "Autorität und Freiheit"): "To-day a generation of young people is growing up whose characters have not been trained under the influence of inviolable truths. The more confidently they deal with the problems of life, the more speedily, in consequence, religious and ethical anarchy spreads, the more will thoughtful people be driven to perceive the instability of the whole principle of intellectual individualism." The intellect can do nothing for man unless it subserves the development of spiritual life and personality, and Eucken has done no greater

service to the civilization of to-day than that which he performs in his attack upon one-sided intellectualism and the worship of the individual reason. He points out again and again that intellectual work does not become really positive and productive until it is associated with a *great view of life as a whole*, until the mere individual reason has found its right place in the world of spiritual values and is itself guided and impelled by eternal and super-individual forces.

Regarded from such a standpoint as this, how deplorably false is our modern education! Its failure is rooted in the fact that it does not provide a spiritual view of life as a whole, and does not affect that transference of the centre of gravity of life from the natural to the spiritual world, which is demanded by Eucken. It operates, indeed, as would a shipbuilding yard which constructed vessels complete in every other particular, with elaborate machinery and highly-trained crews, but devoid of steering gear and compasses.

This little article should have made at any rate one thing clear—namely, that the main need of the day and the one thing which can really solve the complications of the educational problem, is, in Eucken's words, "a securely established conviction concerning life as a whole."

I cannot do better than close on a note struck by Harnack in the work quoted above, p. 135: "All true education starts from a complete and definite theory of existence, and it is only valuable in so far as it enables men to see life steadily and to see it whole. . . . We must never encourage the dissemination of knowledge or the spread of education, unless at the same time the moral consciousness of those who are taught is invigorated, the inner harmony of their personalities strengthened, and the eternal significance of their lives enriched."

