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### PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY by Leroy E. Loemker

A perennial philosophy is, as its name implies, one with qualities which assure its survival through time and change, and therefore, by generalization, a permanently significant philosophy. It must therefore be universal and inclusive, internally coherent, fruitful of new insights and applications, and reasoned so conclusively that attacks cannot refute, and written or presented so convincingly that reasonable minds cannot resist it.

It can be seen from this definition that a perennial philosophy has never been formulated in complete detail and with final perfection. But it has been an ideal for many thinkers who have sought to state its basic method and principles. This ideal is itself, therefore, perennial, expressing the persistent hope for finality in the philosophical task.

As such it is opposed to skepticism, to historicism and other relativisms, to all intellectual sectarianism and partisanship, and to all forms of what Berkeley called appropriately "minute philosophizing," or the limiting of aim and method to the analysis of a plurality of small, empirically graspable and unrelated problems. A perennial philosophy must offer a unity which relates the total plurality, in particular the unity of theoretical and practical concerns, of knowledge, wisdom, and piety; it must be theoretically complete and of sufficient detail to guide to successful action. Charles Sanders Peirce, in spite of his indeterminism and fallibilism, expressed his commitment to the ideal of a perennial philosophy for a scientific age in the Preface to his *Principles of Philosophy*, reprinted in *Collected Papers* (1931-35):

To outline a theory so comprehensive that, for a long time to come, the entire work of human reason, in philosophy of every school and kind, in mathematics, in psychology, in physical science, in history, in sociology, and in whatever other department there may be, shall appear as the filling

up of its details. The first step toward this is to find simple concepts applicable to every subject

(I, vii, Sec. 1).

Traditionally, however, the ideal reaches beyond this intellectual role to offer bases for a more personal value of religious and moral wisdom, thus showing an affinity with Platonism, Stoicism, and the theological appropriations of classical thought in general.

### *I. HISTORY OF THE TERM PHILOSOPHIA PERENNIS*

So far as can be discovered, the term “*philosophia perennis*” is modern, first appearing in the Renaissance. But the ideal of such a philosophy is much older—as old, indeed, as the hope for a definitive resolution of human problems. Though the term “*philosophia perennis*” is widely associated with the philosopher Leibniz, in whose writings it appears and whose thought aims at many characteristics essential to it, he himself found it in Augustinus Steuchius, a theologian of the sixteenth century, librarian of the Vatican, and Regular Canon of the Congregation of the Sacred Savior, who in 1540 published the *De philosophia perenni sive veterum philosophorum cum theologia christiana consensu libri X*, a work which quickly passed through several editions, including that in the *Opera omnia* in 1591. No evidence has been found that Steuch found the term in earlier writers, though cognate terms such as “perennious fountain of God's will” and “perennial wisdom of God” were not uncommon, and the term has been applied retroactively to the Scholastics.

Dedicated to the Farnese Pope, Paul III, initiator of the Counter-Reformation, Steuch's work is an apology for Christian orthodoxy as a return to an originally revealed absolute truth made available to man before his fall, completely forgotten in that lapse, and only gradually regained in fragmentary form in the subsequent history of human thought. Thus from its first use, the term represented an attempt at a perfect thought system, the unity of reason and revelation, but present in the history of thought only as an ideal which may be said to be “regulative” (in Kant's

sense) and directive of man's striving for intellectual unity.

The history of the term since Steuch may be said to be fortuitous and infrequent—useful but far from indispensable in the justification of a certain philosophical tradition. It came to Leibniz in the next century only as the title of Steuch's book, and he used it more generally only in the later years of his life as

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a term for the type of philosophy he himself was striving to formulate. In 1687 Simon Foucher, a Paris friend who had revived the tradition of academic skepticism, called Leibniz' attention to Steuch's book in connection with a discussion of philosophic first principles, saying that Steuch's design seemed to be chiefly to adapt the ancients to Christianity, “which is indeed very beautiful, rather than to order the thoughts of philosophy in their places” (Gerhardt, I, 395). Leibniz had already known of Steuch, however; in the reading notes of his early Mainz years he had several times listed him and his book among “the Christian writers of all times” (Academy ed. VI, i, 532-33; VI, ii, 137, where he quotes Steuch's statement that God is *intelligens intellectum et intellectionem*, “understanding, understood, and still understanding,” i.e., as act, as object, and as process). But as in the case of other terms which Leibniz read as a youth and then forgot, only to recall them much later at an opportune time in his own thinking, the term cannot be found again until 26 August, 1714, when, in a letter to Remond de Montmort, he used it in describing what was needed to complete his own system, to which he had referred in earlier correspondence as a hypothesis (Gerhardt, III, 624-25). What was still needed was an eclectic analysis of the truth and falsehood of all philosophies, both ancient and modern. In this process “one would draw the gold from the dross, the diamond from its mine, the light from the shadows; and this would be in effect a kind of perennial philosophy” (*perennis quaedam philosophia*). This is the *locus classicus* for the term in Leibniz, who gives in the same passage a brief sketch of the contributions of the major schools and also makes a reference to the “Orientals, who have beautiful and grand ideas of the Deity.”

After Leibniz the term seems to go underground, only to reappear in different philosophical contexts; sometimes in support of the conclusion that a certain tradition—for example, Scholasticism—possesses the quality of unity, adequacy, and time-transcendence which the term implies. Thus it reappeared as the title of a collection of papers on Scholasticism, with some emphasis upon its new development after the Council of Trent, edited by Fritz-Joachim von Rintelen, and presented to Josef Geysler for his sixtieth birthday. Sometimes the term has been used for an eclectic combination of religious and philosophical ideas from East and West, proposed as a way of spiritual revival for modern man, as in Aldous Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy* (1944). In all cases, the term stands for the notion of a philosophy of philosophies, an enduring set of intellectual and personal insights which is repeated in all variations of thought and conviction and which serves as an ideal of unity for thought and life.

## *II. HISTORY OF THE IDEA OF A PHILOSOPHIA PERENNIS*

As has already been suggested, certain convictions were traditionally regarded as essential to the ideal of a perennial philosophy.

- (1) **Realism:** that is, the view that the aim of philosophy is the knowledge of an independent world, including an order of ideas (universals, forms, laws) as an important aspect of this real order.
- (2) **Harmony:** that human experience in both its cognitive and its practical aspects involves an underlying unity in which all plurality is resolved, this unity itself having an individual nature which makes it the object of religious veneration.
- (3) A philosophical method in which analysis is completed in synthesis, but synthesis is itself a means to direct apprehension, through dialectic, intuition, revelation, or mystic vision; that therefore reason and faith are coextensive and mutually supporting.
- (4) In particular, an eclectic method which assures this unity of being and truth through a quest for the truths and errors of all historical sects, old and new, seeking to synthesize their truths; thus eclecticism seeks

to resolve the conflict between tradition and innovation, “ancients and moderns.”

(5) Dualism of the ideally real and the historically real, historical philosophies being imperfect approximations, more or less adequate, to a perfect and complete system of truth. Implicit in this is the eschatological orientation which holds that the end and limit of history must be sought in the complete and eternal. This eschatological position is not utopian, however, for utopias temporalize the eternal and are therefore either philosophical heresies or metaphors.

These characteristic doctrines, of course, point to Platonism as the tradition most adequate for a perennial philosophy, though this Platonism may be that of the negative theology suggested by Plotinus, the Christian theism of Saint Augustine, or an eclectic fusion of Platonism and Aristotelianism. Lovejoy's discussion of the two gods of Platonism (in the last lecture of *The Great Chain of Being*, 1933; published in 1936) is applicable as well to the two philosophies, historical and eternal, implied by this tradition, which finds support also in such doctrines as the degrees of truth and being, the negative or privative theory of error and evil, and the macrocosm-microcosm relation. Though the roots of the ideal of a perennial philosophy may be found in the rise of philosophy itself, the clear conception may be dated from the attempts to use Greek philosophy to explicate the theological traditions of the theistic religions.

*1. Ancient and Early Christian Concepts.* The eclectic interest shown by Plato in his dialogues, but

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developed more fully in Aristotle, who built his thought upon an evaluation of the insights and errors of his predecessors, was expanded in the Hellenistic period in opposition to skepticism and in support of the new role of philosophy as handmaiden to religion. But the historical beginnings of the ideal of perenniality in philosophy may with much truth be ascribed to Philo of Alexandria, who found Plato to be Moses speaking Attic. The much looser eclecticism of the so-called Hermetic Corpus, the alleged writings of Hermes Trismegistus, was a collection of Platonic, Pythagorean,

and popular wisdom gathered in Egypt, which was later considered an important source. Thus the Eastern tradition of wisdom and mysteries came through the cultural impact of Alexander's conquests to be absorbed into the eclecticism of the West.

It was in the fusion of Greek with the Hebrew-Christian tradition, however, that the redemptive and the theoretical, the historical and the eternal, were more firmly united and justified. The two Platonic traditions—the mysticism of Plotinus with its hierarchy of beings and its negative theology, and the conceptualized and personalized theory of Augustine with its trinity of modalities in God and its history of creation and redemption, were eventually combined in a theology which was at once the highest philosophy and the justification of faith. The perennial philosophy was, for Augustine, the rational Christian faith.

In Augustine, moreover, this religious metaphysics was reinforced with a profound psychology of sin and redemption, and what proved to be the orthodox Christian conception of history as a record of the fall of man, the conflict of good and evil, the successive acts of revelation and redemption, and the culminating judgment and end of time. This pattern of history itself provided the intellectual foundation of the ideal of a perennial philosophy.

**2. Scholasticism.** Although the late *Retractations* of Augustine involve a surrender of reason to authority, and therefore must have suggested to him that his theology was not absolute and eternal, Christian thought for centuries achieved a stability by discussing the alternative interpretations involved in Augustine's staunch rational fideism, and the Neo-Platonic tradition of mystical vision.

It may therefore be with better reason that the distinction of achieving the principles of a perennial philosophy has been assigned to the great Scholastic *Summas* and commentaries, in which the casuistic work of qualifying, amplifying, and applying this philosophical theology was continued with the aid of Aristotle's logic and metaphysics.

**3. The Renaissance and Steuch.** The revival of ancient literature and learning in the West led to a criti

cism of the Scholastic tradition and a widespread development of philosophical sects and controversies. Petrarch humanized Augustine to confront man with his freedom and powers; Nicholas of Cusa developed Christian Platonism in a comprehensive way which acknowledged skepticism but also revived great cosmological and apologetic issues; Stoicism was adapted in various ways to the courtly ideal of the *homo honestatis* through the principles of natural law and the virtue of obedience; Aristotelians, discovering the “true” as opposed to the Scholastic Aristotle, concentrated on his logic and physics, and became forerunners of the new science and its methods. Not until the religious controversies of the sixteenth century did metaphysics have a vigorous revival, largely in Scholastic terms. Meanwhile eclecticism was demanded by the variety of sects, and Platonism undertook the role of harmonizer of positions. In Florence, Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, and others, influenced by Nicholas of Cusa, undertook to reconcile Plato and Aristotle.

By the end of the sixteenth century, the humanistic, creative period of the Renaissance was thus disciplined and intellectualized, so that eclecticism flowered into encyclopedism—an effort, not without eschatological sanction, to exhaust the possibilities of knowledge and to organize it in a logically structured way. Of this encyclopedic movement Francis Bacon was the most popular and influential representative.

For Augustine Steuch, to whom we owe the term “*philosophia perennis*,” metaphysics was still secondary to the Christian history of creation, fall, and redemption; his idea of philosophy identifies it with revelation (*omnium sacrarum literarum philosophia*). This perennial philosophy requires not only wisdom but grace; in a commentary to the first chapters of Genesis Steuch writes, “There never was true philosophy without piety.”

Human wisdom, however, has been corrupted in the long history of fallen man, Steuch continues, and the history of God's redemption includes the long quest for this saving wisdom. This historical development itself involves three kinds of philosophy: a common sense one diffused through oral transmission among all peoples; a critical refinement of this “arising in the

speculation about the nature and causes of things”; and (a third) the full radiance of truth dispelling darkness everywhere; “this alone is worthy of the name of Wisdom.” The rest of Steuch's work is a wide-ranging eclectic examination of the variety of traditions contributing to the chief doctrines of Christian theology, beginning with the Trinity and ending with the end of things and Last Judgment.

#### **4. *The Seventeenth Century and Leibniz.* At the beginning of the new century, three developments**

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which we have already noted became important in affecting changes in philosophy, and therefore also in the ideal of a perennial philosophy: the revival of metaphysics and the critical examination of first principles of “being as being,” which arose from theological controversy; encyclopedism, the impulse, coming from the new spirit of discovery, to exhaust the possibilities of human knowledge and its ordering through a logical method; and the success of a method combining experience and reason (particularly mathematical) in achieving certainty in the new sciences of nature. The total philosophical effect of these projects was to render plausible to the great minds of the century the direct achievement of a complete, unified, and therefore time-transcending, perennial body of knowledge and wisdom. The so-called “rationalists” of the century sought this completion of the philosophical ideal.

The new encyclopedic spirit was widespread, but that part of it which sought to attain its end through a new method is most instructive. The pansophic movement was associated with Amos Comenius but also included, among others, his teacher John Henry Alsted, author of the great *Encyclopaedia* of 1630, and John Bisterfeld, whose many plans for a universal science of characters or symbols and an encyclopedia influenced Leibniz in his early youth. This movement adopted principles of method from Bacon, Ramus, and the revived interest in Raymond Lully's (or Lull) *Ars generalis sive magna* (ca. 1272) and applied them, ineffectually but with a zeal inspired by the conviction of Christ's imminent return.

Futile though their pretentious efforts were, the platforms of these men (for example, Comenius' *Prodromus pansophiae*, written in London in 1641) popularized the ideal of a completed philosophy which should go beyond the traditional fields of logic, metaphysics and physics, ethics and political theory, to embrace all possible knowledge, and which should do this by a unitary and certain method. The sense of urgency with which this method of combining empirical content with logical order was pursued, endured throughout the century.

The historical study of philosophy in a critical sense is closely related to the development of philosophical eclecticism of a soberer and more disciplined kind than that of Steuch. The crowning achievement of eclecticism appeared only later in the Enlightenment in Jacob Brucker's great *Historia critica philosophiae a tempore resuscitatarum in occidente literarum ad nostram temporem* (Leipzig, 1766), a work which Brucker argued would restore to philosophy, through the eclecticism of which Bacon was "parent," the "God of truth which it had until then neglected." But eclecticism had borne earlier fruit in such historical works as the *Origines historicae philosophiae et ecclesiasticae* (Leipzig, 1665), of Leibniz' teacher Jacob Thomasius, and Gerhard Johann Voss's *De philosophiae et philosophorum sectis libri II* (The Hague, 1658). After describing eighteen philosophical sects with Greek origins, Voss rejects them all, passing over Plato, whose language he finds unfit for philosophizing, but praising Aristotle, who "stands out in sharpness of genius and variety of doctrine above all who preceded him as the light of the sun stands out above that of the moon and lesser stars" (Ch. 21, Sec. 1). Yet he urges acceptance of an eclecticism "which founds no new doctrines but selects its doctrines from others," urging this course as the most productive even though it is also the most difficult. "In the examination of all sects we must first see what is said, why it is said, what can be argued against it, and whether the two sides can be reconciled" (Ch. 21, Sec. 13).

Descartes repudiated the eclectic approach for the supposed certainty of an original logical method, which he nevertheless expected to result in a perennial

pattern of thought. Though the other great systematizers of the century rejected Descartes' repudiation of the past as itself sectarian, they shared his confidence in a method which should at last achieve the adequation of thought to things through an insistence upon clear and distinct concepts, and should therefore bring philosophy in its history into identity with eternal truth. Unfortunately their disagreements merely sharpened and broadened the dualism of the actual and the ideal.

Of these thinkers, Leibniz was the most specific in formulating the goal of perennality, the most thorough in his eclectic examination of historical philosophies, and the clearest in his formulation of adequate method. This method was analytic in its reduction of all experience and all questions to the primary notions and first principles entailed in them. It was then synthetic in its generalizing these principles and their application, through the appropriate definitions, to the various fields of knowledge and practice to be investigated. The unity and harmony of the results were assured by the simplicity and universal applicability of the principles.

Leibniz' development of a plan and program for a perennial philosophy was gradual. Involved from the beginning was a Neo-Platonic world view akin to that of Nicholas of Cusa, of Bruno, and of the Italian Platonists, in which the universal harmony of being and truth is reflected in the greatest possible variety in every created individual being, and man, possessed of the quality of inwardness and created with a nature compounded of the very attributes of God (in finite measure), finds his good in obedience to the order of law established in creation—natural, moral, and civil.

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Within this general and incompletely defined theory, Leibniz' early philosophical conceptions were loosely eclectic. In physics he preferred the mechanistic interpretations of the "moderns" to the dynamic forms of the Scholastics, but deliberated on problems of motion, following Suárez and the Cartesians in using motion as a basic argument for the existence of God. In logic (as in jurisprudence) he was strongly influenced by Hobbes, but Leibniz' youthful nominalistic inclinations

did not keep him from a conceptualistic theory of combinations, a connotative interpretation of logic, and an Augustinian theology. His own work centered in practical applications: a projected work in Christian apologetics, proofs for the existence of God to refute atheists, essays in education, problems of jurisprudence and of theology as the highest jurisprudence, and interest in the logical foundations of metaphysics and the theory of knowledge. He studied the efforts being made to reconcile Plato and Aristotle, Aristotle and Euclid, Aristotle and the “moderns,” substantial forms with mechanism. His inclusive motive may be stated in terms of the phrase borrowed from Galen by Robert Boyle (1626-91, whom Leibniz read in 1671-72): the investigation of truth is the greatest of hymns to the creator.

In the Paris years there emerged the intention to construct a central, unifying philosophical work of inclusive and exhaustive scope, based on an essential unity of metaphysics and logic. Leibniz' synthesizing efforts were stimulated by his intensive study of Plato, Aristotle, and the papers of Pascal and Descartes, and his contacts with thinkers like Boyle, Malebranche, Foucher, and Christian Huygens.

In the early years at Hanover (from 1676 to 1684, perhaps the most creative years of his life), many plans and studies (*Initia* and *Specimina*) were written for such an ultimate decoding and mastery of the whole of truth. Various titles were tried. The papers of the Paris period (1672-76) contain the tentative title *Elementa philosophiae arcanae de summa rerum*. In the years 1679 to 1682, such titles appear as *Aurora seu initia scientiae generalis a divina luce ad humanam felicitatem* (in Gehardt, VII, 54) and *Initia et specimina scientiae novae generalis pro instauratione et augmentis scientiarum ad publicam felicitatem* (ibid., VII, 64ff., 124ff.), titles obviously influenced by Bacon, Glanvill, or More. While the essays written to fit these titles do not reflect any eschatological convictions, they are impelled by a sense of urgency and show a conviction that, given a universal science of symbols and a combinatorial method (a logic and analysis and synthesis), the end could be achieved within a lifetime. These essays contain the most complete description of the

content and procedures of this General Science, including Leibniz' most detailed examination of the traditional sects of philosophy (ibid., 141-56). In this period Leibniz' vision of the practicality of this perennial philosophy seems to have been particularly clear and strong.

The distractions of the years from 1684 to 1695 permitted time only for the perfection of Leibniz' metaphysics and dynamics, with continuing studies in logic and mathematics. The last two decades of his life (1696-1716) were filled with controversies about his opinions which served to clarify them but involved an abandonment of his great projects; his philosophical studies were aimed at winning support for his thought from scholars and leaders of opinion. Although there remain many reflections of his great enterprise in the papers of this period, the distinction between his achievement and the regulative ideal of a perennial philosophy becomes clear. There are impressive brief descriptions of the scope of his philosophical concerns, including compact criticisms of earlier philosophical traditions (for example, in the letters to Gabriel Wagner in 1696, in Gerhardt, VII, 514-27; to Michael Hansch on Platonic Enthusiasm, 1707, in G. W. Leibniz, *Opera omnia*, ed. Louis Dutens, 6 vols. Geneva [1768], II, 222-25; to Korthold, in Dutens, V, 320; to Bouvet, 1697, in Erdmann, p. 146; to Remond in the letters already mentioned; and in the response to the second edition of Bayle's *Dictionnaire*, 1702, in Gerhardt, IV, 554-710). Yet there is no claim of completion or of perenniality. To De Volder and others Leibniz spoke of his philosophy as an hypothesis (though one which had been proved). And in the letter to Remond in which the term "perennial philosophy" occurs, he ventured the remark that given the assistance which he needed, the final system might yet be achieved.

Thus it may be said that although Leibniz' descriptions of the *General Science of the Secrets of the Universe* involve all of the components essential to the perennial philosophy, and his mature philosophy itself gives a coherent account of the first principles and the structure of disciplines involved in such a system, he

was unable to complete it, and never claimed to have done so.

*5. Perennial Philosophy since Kant.* Although the ideal of a perennial philosophy was still effective in the Enlightenment, its role was gradually restricted to the reasonable bringing of order into a narrower, more nominalistic realm of experience and practice. Christian Wolff, it is true, claimed demonstrative certainty for his eclectic union of Scholastic metaphysics with Leibniz' pluralism and Newton's physics, reducing faith to reason and claiming a *philosophia certa et utilis*. But although certain vestiges of the ideal of a transcendent

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and universal harmony remained in such concepts as the law of nature, the absolutes of science, and moral rights and duties, the acids of subjectivity, nominalism, and skepticism corroded changeless concepts into associated experiences of a passing, atomic kind. Kant's emphasis upon the universal and necessary, and the architectonic which underlies his critiques, still presuppose the ideal of perenniality. But in arguing for the irresolvable antinomies of metaphysics and making mind the key to the first principles of knowledge and right action, Kant confronted philosophy with the dilemma of abandoning the ideal of a perennial philosophy or of forcing it to be sought not in what transcends experience and history but in what is changeless and abiding within them.

What Kant achieved with respect to the first principles of logic and truth, moreover, his idealistic followers, particularly Hegel, achieved for the relation of the perennial to history. Seen critically, Hegel's philosophy may be viewed as a remarkable account of the relation between historical philosophies and the perennial ideal: the absolute is seen in the development of its components in history, and the completion of the historical can be evaluated only in relation to the absolute. But the ambiguities of this relationship led many of Hegel's successors to the conclusion that the ideal of a perennial philosophy is itself a delusion to be rejected (for example, Kierkegaard and Dewey), or that it must be found within the historical and changing rather than

in a realm transcending it (for example, Marx, Croce, Jaspers, and followers of Dilthey).

The ideal of a perennial and complete philosophy still haunts the minds of philosophers, probably of a majority even in a positivistic and analytic age. The total effect of the Kantian and Hegelian revolutions of thought have stimulated later philosophers to assume three distinct positions with regard to this ideal.

(1) There is the view of those who have held that the perennial philosophy (in spite of Kant, or through a realistic interpretation of him) is still valid and effective; that its essential structure has been explicated in the thought of many thinkers and constitutes the firm structure, so to speak, about which Western thought and much of Eastern thought has developed. It is an ideal, but one actualized in part, and still in the process of actualization in full.

The Neo-Scholastic movement has in general held this position, as the essays in von Rintelen's work and the dominant theme in Hirschberger's *Geschichte der Philosophie* clearly show.

As an early representative of the same position, Adolf Trendelenberg deserves attention. A critic of Hegel and interpreter of Aristotle, he undertook to recall philosophy from "the humiliating position into which it had been crowded" in his day, and to restore "that philosophy which has been called to unite all peoples and times in a universal human vision and in the necessary task of the sciences, as Plato and Aristotle once did." He condemned the current philosophical tradition in which "a new beginning must be made and a new end reached in each head" (*Logische Untersuchungen*, 2nd ed., 1867, Preface; see also the concluding chapters of the 1st ed., 1840). In a less critical, more loosely eclectic way, the idea of an eternal philosophical order, including a way of redemption, but uniting Western thought with related traditions in the East is offered in Aldous Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy* (1944).

(2) A second post-Kantian position is that of positivists of a wide variety of types, who follow Hume and Kant in their most empirical and analytic mood, and who reject the entire ideal of a perennial philosophy

along with their repudiation of metaphysics. The list of those who have done this, from Comte to Ayer and his contemporaries, is a long one; it includes some of William James's essays on pragmatism, and many existentialists. But it is noteworthy that the internal drive toward metaphysics within these modes of thought (Comte's "unity of the sciences," Spencer's "first principles," the "realms of being" of Santayana, Heidegger's "*Sein des Seienden*," and recent attempts at "descriptive metaphysics") indicate that the hope of perennality is not entirely dead, even in positivism.

(3) A third point of view about perennial components in philosophy is that which finds the perennial not beyond the history of thought but within it, either as the historical process of thought itself, or as an abstraction of a logical or metaphysical structure from it. In the former group may be considered Dilthey and such followers as Eduard Spranger and Arthur Liebert (for whom philosophy *is* its history), Hegelian temporalists like Benedetto Croce, and existentialists of the Jaspers type, for whom *das Umgreifende* is unattainable, and the perennial philosophy has never been achieved, "and yet such a philosophy always exists in the idea of philosophical thought and in the general picture of the truth of philosophy considered in its history over three millennia which become a single present" (*The Perennial Scope of Philosophy*, p. 25).

On the other hand, Jaspers may also be classed with those recent philosophers who have found perennality of thought to be an abstraction from its history. "In our temporal transience we know the actuality and simultaneity of essential truth, of the *philosophia perennis* which at all times effaces time" (*ibid.*, p. 169). Perennial meaning is to be found in the dialogue of

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the few great thinkers, carried on through time. Similarly, Nicolai Hartmann argued more analytically that it is the great problems which constitute the permanent component in philosophy, since they involve the unfolding of apories "without reference to their solvability and without flirting with preconceived results" (*Deutsche Systematische Philosophie* [1931], I, 281), while the depth-psychologist Erich Rothacker finds it

in “the critical awareness of the eternal flood of dark and light pictures which arise from the depths of the soul.” Among these quests for the permanent (if not the eternal) in the relative and changing, must also be considered the metaphysical methods of process philosophers as diverse as Paul Tillich and Alfred North Whitehead, one reviving Schelling, the other Plato himself, both of whom have sought an eternal through abstraction from the facts of change.

The problem of clarifying a conception of a perennial philosophy thus itself reflects thought about the entire history of philosophy, with respect to the question of the place of this history in the philosophic task itself.

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