
This significant contribution to classical and contemporary American philosophy consists in carefully extracted portions of the thought-work of William Ernest Hocking, called "Hocking in His Own Words," (214 pp.). The second part, called "Hocking as Seen Today," consists in contemporary commentators providing ten critical/appreciative essays on his thought (144 pp.). The work concludes with a Select Bibliography of Hocking's works and a helpful Index.

Hocking identified his philosophy as both a "mystical realism . . . the only tenable sort of realism" and a "transfigured naturalism which is idealism." (See his Confessio Fidei, pp. 213-14.) Such self-presentations suggest why philosophers both of his day and of ours have pushed him into an obscurity which neither he nor his work deserve. The effort of the present editors and commentators to reduce this obscurity is certainly well grounded and something Hocking merits. To them belongs our indebtedness for their commendable service.

To experience "Hocking in his Own Words" is to awaken to the breadth and depth of this thinker. In this obviously great and gifted mind the whole gamut of philosophical interests surge upwards like a Fourth of July closing display of fireworks. For Hocking introduces us into the nature of philosophizing itself, metaphysics, ethics, esthetics, ultimate questions in astrophysics, international law, Christian missions, cultural and religious dialogue along East-West lines, human nature and its remaking, philosophy of history, the constitution of the State, and the meaning of God in human experience. This book's limits of space precluded a chapter on Hocking's significant work on international law and another on his layman's view of Christian missionary work throughout the world, written for lay missioners in the field.

Hocking studied under Josiah Royce and on returning to Harvard was Royce's colleague. Accordingly, the reader of this volume will here find a thinker who both developed many of Royce's positions yet often broke away from Royce...
developed such distinctively Roycean ideas as the public character of physical objects and of Nature itself (58-59), the theory of signs (61), the balancing principles that meaning descends from the whole to the parts while value ascends inductively from parts to the whole (63), the critical role of an authentic communal "we" while uncovering the trap which an inauthentic "we" often hides (67-68). Picking up Royce’s endorsement of Prof. Henderson’s thesis on the fittingness of the physical environment for promoting the origin of organic life, Hocking, like Royce, emphasized the teleology embedded in global evolution (181).

Yet Hocking showed himself distinctively independent of Royce on other points, perhaps because he depended less on Peirce and symbolic logic than did the late Royce. Rooted in his mystical realism, Hocking held an immediate dialectical knowledge of the other person’s mind. By this means Hocking got beyond Royce’s hypothetical postulate of the other’s mind. (Note on p 91 the passage of the erroneously supposed Wall between Thee and Me.) Unlike Royce’s emphasis on the need to balance genuine individualism and genuine loyalty, Hocking stressed the “will to power” insofar as it is guided by ideas. He refused to follow Royce’s claim that a social mind was a person on a higher level with a mind and will of its own (86-89). Instead, Hocking chose a thesis about “will circuits” to explain societies (119-27), giving primary reality to individuals and viewing their social endeavors like the arm of a person’s organism. Hocking was not nearly as obsessed with the problem of evil as was Royce and created his own version of a “neglected argument to God’s reality” when he worked from the physicist’s encounter with a sense datum. For the datum is a given (gift) which summons (calls) the physicist to conversation with a Thou—that Other in the mystic’s eye who finds in this encounter “the garment of the living God” (181).

Although Hocking did not wear his religion on his sleeve, it was powerfully at work underneath. Unless a person enters empathetically into Hocking’s religious position, he or she will read his works without understanding them. My own personal experience with Hocking left me convinced of this. As a neophyte in Roycean research, I had gone to meet him at his home and farm outside Madison, New Hampshire, in summer 1958. After he courteously answered my questions for several hours and our Royce work lay finished, I told him my final question had nothing to do with Royce but that he might wish to answer it. So, as the two of us stood overlooking his land’s grand expanse
that leads up to majestic Mt. Washington away in the distance, I asked him, "Professor Hocking, who is Jesus Christ for you?" There was a shock of silence, and then white-haired Professor Hocking straightened up to the full stature of all his six and a half feet and confessed calmly yet boldly, "He is my Lord and my God." (After this I could only congratulate him of the gift of faith given him and invite him to keep using it to the full.)

For decades this experience has impressed me and still convinces me of the strength of religious life underlying and empowering much of Hocking’s philosophical work.

For instance, in his 1944 essay, entitled “Faith and World Order,” he noted that the “religious being...cannot keep his faith with his Maker if he destroys his duty to his fellow man.” Hocking then concluded, “Christ said, in effect, ‘He who offends one of the least of my brethren has no one to whom he can pray.’ And men reach the time sooner or later when they realize that prayer is their breath of life, far beyond the political sphere in its necessity and its realism” (191). This essay and the following one, “Vox Dei,” underscore the indispensable role which faith-filled conscience needs must play in any political order.

Turning to the second section, “Hocking as Seen Today,” the reader will find in-depth articles that assay and criticize various dimensions of Hocking’s thought and sometimes even concur with him. Of the ten essays presented, I here select five for highlighting. Limits of space make me pass over the essays by John Howie, Bruce Wilshire, LeRoy S. Rouner, Tom Buford, and George L. Kline. I invite the reader to research their helpful subsidies to a vitally needed retrieval of W. E. Hocking.

Vincent Colapietro offers an intriguing and penetrating study entitled “Hocking’s Critique of Modernity: Countering Solipsism and Cultivating Solitude” (245-79). In step with Hocking and aided by him, Colapietro aims at “the very heart of the present,” that focal point which Hocking had himself so emphasized. Without confining experience to the present, Colapietro embraces “present experience at once personal and communicable” (246). Doing so leads both Hocking and Colapietro beyond modernity, beyond its unbalanced stress on subjectivity and its solipsistic worldview. Using what Hocking calls an empirical conscience, Colapietro embraces the natural
world in its historical flow as an “objective impersonal order.” He makes sure that experience is seen as a vital affair—yes, of knowing, but especially of living, and living in all its richness as found in its series of distinct yet overlapping situations. Hence, Hocking’s grasp of experience, wider and deeper than that of the British empiricists, makes it into a dialogue between the self and the world in which both are present to the Other.

Via Agnes, Hocking’s wife, the inspiring teacher of Shady Hill School in Cambridge, Colapietro proposes what may seem an excursus on Hocking’s autobiography. The shadow of Agnes fell intimately on young Ernest and shaped him profoundly. Soon their union was one of poetry and philosophy, each sensing the need of the Other. Hocking’s philosophical break-through occurred when he studied William James’s early critique of Herbert Spencer and later James’s Principles. These liberated Hocking from the thought of Spencer. Hocking discovered in James’s view of consciousness far more than its cognitive aspect since it was also replete with attention, affects, choices, and especially a reference to an object or goal. This kind of reference implied a teleology which underlay James’s view of consciousness as “a fighter for ends.”

Freed by his wife’s influence and this insight into the concrete syntheses of conscious mind, Hocking escaped modernity’s prison of subjectivity. He found not the “Wall” of separation but an intersubjective union with the Other. (See pp. 237-38 for Hocking’s renowned paragraph on the supposed “Wall between you and me”–a Wall that crumbles in the lived union of Thou and Me.)

Hocking was led to a further liberation when he transcended Royce’s postulational hypothesis of knowing the mind of the Other. Hocking saw that our lived grasp of the other person’s reality lay in a genuine knowledge within experience, and not in an inference or Roycean hypothesis. To Hocking’s surprise, Royce blessed this insight and invited Hocking to cultivate it the more. Through these and other liberating steps Colapietro shows how Hocking came to metaphysical empiricism with its wider view of experience and its entrance into post-modern philosophizing.

Douglas Anderson offers an essay entitled “W. E. Hocking and the Liberal Spirit” (303-317). He focuses on the vital link operating between one’s way of philosophizing and one’s
personal stance, attitudes, and habits. Concerned that the entrepreneurial spirit waxes mightily in universities where the genuinely liberal spirit should predominate, Anderson faults a "leave me alone" spirit as a false spirit of liberalism. Instead, he quotes Hocking’s mid-1930 attack on the isolated "suburban weeds" who, while economically successful, are dead as genuinely liberal spirits and unfit for the life of the mind which liberal educators are to foster:

These rugged individuals at their maturity remain truncated torsos of humanity stuck around in handsome private estates on the edges of a thousand cities. . . . They have no mission, they are mere promissory futilities, empty of moral dignity; and the rights they claim become more and more a social protection to a low grade aesthetic consciousness. They might as well not exist. The society that flowers into these sturdy unfragrant weeds as its best blossom is a moral and cultural failure.”

("The Future of Liberalism," 236)

Anderson then expresses his desire: I hope, at least, even if we disagree with Hocking’s philosophical diagnosis, that we of the thinking trade, offspring of a liberal culture, can avoid cultivating ourselves into the suburban weeds he documented. In a more positive vein, I am willing to risk that a living version of his liberal spirit might help us take a run at what he called the "one achievement worth noting": the "creation of a certain individual beauty in living and in the environment of living— one’s Task." (316)

John Stuhr’s article, "The Defects of Liberalism: Lasting Elements of W. E. Hocking’s Philosophy" (318-34) pleasantly imagines going on a blind date with Hocking, the "negative pragmatist," falling in love with this critic of liberalism, yet concluding by breaking up with Hocking, the "incorrigible Absolutist." Employing a fluent, expansive, almost prolix style, Stuhr allows his basic opposition to any Absolute or God to permeate his paragraphs. Nor does he address the gap between institutions and natural communities along with theories of these two.
Next, John E. Smith proposes "W. E. Hocking’s Insights About the Individual and the State" (335-48). Smith deeply appreciates Hocking’s insight into the radical role which conscience plays in Hocking’s overall philosophy, particularly in his political theory. For Hocking, conscience forms the central core of the human individual, especially in the individual’s relation to the God of Christians. Smith also supplies a rich exegesis of Hocking’s key insight about “circuits,” “circuits of will,” and the “circuit of circuits of will”—the last named being the State, as he sees it.

Finally, Robert Neville creates a capstone commentary entitled, "Metaphysic and World Philosophy: W. E. Hocking on Chinese Philosophy" (367-820). Here Neville opportunity opens windows to the East, as Hocking had done before him. Neville graciously selects for his focus Hocking’s study of Zhuxi, the medieval Chinese Confucian philosopher, insofar as found in Hocking’s essay, "Chu Hsi’s Theory of Knowledge." Although Hocking gave more time and care to his studies of Buddhism and Hinduism, this his sole study of Chinese Confucianism provided an instance of Hocking’s interest in promoting “world philosophy,” even before the term “globalization” affected philosophers as well as billions of their fellow earthlings. Neville shows how the moral and teleological elements of Zhuxi are ingredient in the best of Confucian thought. This can serve as a critique of a certain selfishness in the Buddhists’ “turn to the self,” a turn which impedes the capability required for scientific knowing. For the latter requires a selfless opening to Nature if one intends to be taught by Nature viewed as objective process.

In brief, all these commentaries make W. E. Hocking relevant to our twenty-first century experience. Meanwhile, this Reader’s well-chosen writings of Hocking provide us with more than a spacious foyer for deeper entry into the hospitable house of W. E. Hocking’s enriching mind.

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**Being and Value: Toward a Constructive Postmodern Metaphysics.**