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From a Pragmatist's Point of View: George Herbert Mead's Unattributed Review of Theodore Merz's A History of European Thought in the Nineteenth Century

Abstract: In 1914, on the eve of the Great War, the eminent scholar and polymath, Theodore Merz, published what would be the final volume of his magisterial history of nineteenth-century European thought. A belated review of this volume appeared in the April 1918 issue of the *American Historical Review*. This particular review, though favorable, was inexplicably unsigned. Our paper offers compelling evidence that the author of this unsigned review was George H. Mead, the pragmatist philosopher from the University of Chicago. The paper is organized in the following fashion. First, several types of documentary evidence are cited in support of the claim that Mead authored the unsigned review. Second, content analysis is used to identify themes in the review that reflect the distinctive intellectual concerns of Mead. One such concern was the ability of research-based science to address and rectify problematic aspects of social life. The concluding section of the paper reprints in its entirety Mead's 1918 review.

I

In the April, 1918 issue of the *American Historical Review* appeared an anonymous review of Volume 4 of Theodore Merz's magisterial *A History of European Thought in the Nineteenth Century*. J. Franklin Jameson (1920: 13), the managing editor at the time, noted that book reviewers were "[l]eft free to sign or not to sign, most of our reviewers sign their reviews". Even though the review of Merz was unsigned, there is sufficient evidence regarding the review to aver that George Herbert Mead, a pragmatist philosopher from the University of Chicago, was its author¹.

The most direct means to establish Mead's authorship is by examining several letters germane to the published review. On the last day of 1917, Mead wrote his daughter-in-law, Irene Tufts Mead, that he had completed his review of Merz: "In the meantime you will be pleased to know that I have finished the review of Merz. I no longer have [to] think rapidly of something else when I see the volume and it can be placed by the side of its three predecessors, ceasing its mission of reproof and reproach". Mead's letter was posted from Atlanta, Georgia, and Mead also mentioned that he was unable to secure the services of a "public stenographer" to type the finished manuscript².

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1. "Sufficient evidence" encompasses both direct and indirect types of evidence. Direct evidence refers to various documents supporting the claim that Mead was the author of the anonymous review. Indirect evidence implies that the content of the published review exhibits certain ideas or themes associated with Mead's distinctive views of scientific activity and philosophy. Both types of evidence will be used in establishing Mead as the putative author of the unsigned review. According to Huebner (2014: 72-73, 265n27), Mead had previously published another "unsigned" review in the July, 1900 issue of the *American Historical Review*. While the review was unsigned, the index to Volume 5 (1900) identified George H. Mead as its author. In contrast, George H. Mead's name does not appear in the index to Volume 23 (1918) of the *American Historical Review*.

2. University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center, George Herbert Mead Papers, box 1, folder 14, Letter from George H. Mead to Irene T. Mead, December 31, 1917.

Mead's fanciful escape from "reproval and reproach" was short-lived, however. On January 11, 1918, a one-page, chiding letter arrived in Chicago from the office of the *American Historical Review*. The letter reminded Mead that his promised review of Merz was overdue; Volume 4 had been mailed to him on February 9, 1917. Mead was requested to submit his review before February 5, 1918. The letter concluded thusly: "We always wish that our reviews should come out in the earliest possible number after we receive the book, and the publishers are naturally disappointed, and disposed to complain, if they do not. Please do your best to help us"³. In a January 15, 1918 letter to Irene, Mead again referenced Merz when he dryly commented on the length and somewhat turgid prose style of Merz's Volume 4 – 827 pages including introductory materials: "Having finished Merz, [I] have great confidence that even [Trollope's] *The Warden* can be completed"⁴.

In describing the process of selecting book reviewers, Jameson (1920: 12) said the *Review* "sought the aid of the reviewer most qualified in respect to knowledge, judgment, and fairness of mind"⁵. Few scholars were more qualified in 1917 than Mead to review Merz's work. While at the University of Chicago, Mead taught a course titled, "Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century" for twelve quarters⁶. In other words, from 1898 to 1917, Mead taught a course that traversed the same intellectual terrain described in Merz's four published volumes⁷.

If Mead was knowledgeable about the subject matter, why did it take him an inordinate period of time to finish his review? After all, as noted by Jameson (1920: 15), the *American Historical Review* paid book reviewers for their contributions;

3. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Manuscript Division, American Historical Association Records, container no. 292, Editorial Correspondence 1918 K-Y, Letter from J. Franklin Jameson to George H. Mead, January 11, 1918.

4. University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center, George Herbert Mead Papers, box 1, folder 15, Letter from George H. Mead to Irene T. Mead, January 15, 1918. *The Warden*, published in 1855, was the first volume in Anthony Trollope's six-volume *Barchester Towers* cycle of novels.

5. Jameson served as the first managing editor of the *American Historical Review* from 1895 to 1901; a second term as managing editor began in 1905 and ended in 1928. Between 1901 and 1905, Jameson was a faculty member at the University of Chicago. In that capacity he could have known Mead personally, or at least known of Mead's teaching and research interests. In addition, the historian James Harvey Robinson was an associate editor of the *American Historical Review* from 1912 to 1920. Robinson and Mead first met in 1890 while Mead was studying in Germany, and both men sustained a mutual interest in each other's scholarly activities throughout their academic careers. University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center, George Herbert Mead Papers, box 1, folder 3, Letter from George H. Mead to Henry N. Castle, November 4, 1890. It is likely that Robinson recommended Mead as someone capable of intelligently reviewing Merz's fourth volume.

6. The frequency of this course offering was determined by consulting "Appendix 1: Courses Taught by Mead at the University of Chicago, 1894-95 to 1930-31", in Lewis and Smith (1980: 262-271).

7. John Theodore Merz (1840-1922) was a polymath. Apparently, Merz was extraordinarily adept as a philosopher, chemist, business executive, and historian. He was a German-British scholar with a doctorate on Hegel. He was also an industrial chemist serving as the Vice-Chairman of England's Newcastle-on-Tyne Electric Supply Company, which he founded in 1889. Moreover, Merz's *A History of European Thought in the Nineteenth Century* was an exhaustive survey of scientific (Volumes 1 and 2) and philosophical (Volumes 3 and 4) thought. The four volumes were published between 1896 and 1914; and, according to Seidel (1998: 392), they represented "a 2,732-page survey of intellectual development in Germany, France and Britain".

consequently, reviewing a book involved more of a formal contract (i.e., payment for work product) rather than an informal or casual *quid pro quo* (i.e., “Write us an acceptable book review, and we will publish it for you”)⁸. If Mead received Merz’s Volume 4 around mid- February of 1917, then ten months elapsed before the review was completed and submitted. Why? Three reasons can be adduced to explain this apparent lapse in professionalism by Mead. First, the length of Merz’s volume combined with the fact that Mead had committed himself to simultaneously reviewing two other books would have slowed his rate of progress considerably. At the same time Mead was to review Merz’s volume, he had agreed to review a new translation of Wilhelm Wundt’s *Folk Psychology*, as well as Thorstein Veblen’s recently published *The Nature of Peace and the Terms of Its Perpetuation*. By combining the page-count for the three books, it can be seen that Mead had committed himself to reading and comprehending 1.772 pages of often densely footnoted text. An equally formidable task for Mead would have been organizing and writing three separate reviews. Therefore, delays in completing the reviews were almost inevitable.

A second reason for the delay involved the death of Mead’s mother on March 25, 1917 – his father had died in 1881. As noted by Cowles (1917: 75), Elizabeth Storrs Mead was the former president of Mount Holyoke Seminary and College. When she died, the ailing Mrs. Mead was residing at her daughter’s winter home in Florida. In addition to sharing their mutual sorrow, Mead and his only sibling, Alice Mead Swing, were equally responsible for settling their mother’s estate. All of the necessary arrangements attendant upon a death and funeral would have consumed Mead’s immediate attention and energy.

A final reason precluding Mead’s expeditious completion of his review was an international event that had significant ramifications for Mead and his immediate family. The United States entered World War I on April 6, 1917. The most immediate effect of the war upon Mead was to shift his scholarly priorities. Instead of focusing on book reviews, Mead wrote five newspaper articles focusing on various war issues. These articles were published in the *Chicago Herald* during July and August of 1917⁹. In addition to the newspaper articles, Mead prepared a ten-page pamphlet addressing the issue of the conscientious objector for the National Security League¹⁰. On a more personal note, America’s entry into the Great War worried Mead because his only child, Henry C. A. Mead, and his daughter-in-law, Irene Tufts Mead, were both actively participating in different aspects of the war effort. Henry was training to serve with the army in France, and Irene had already volunteered for an overseas

8. In the *Review’s* payment ledger for 1918 there is a receipt showing that on April 2, 1918, “G.H. Meade” was paid “\$8.75” for his “contribution to Apr. 1918 Rev.” Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Manuscript Division, American Historical Association Records, container no. 372, receipt no. 20. It should be noted that an extra “e” was often mistakenly added to George H. Mead’s surname, probably the result of confusing the American philosopher’s surname with the surname of George Gordon Meade (1815-1872), a celebrated officer in the Union Army during the American Civil War.

9. See Mead 1917c, 1917d, 1917e, 1917f, and 1917g.

10. See Mead 1917h. As described by Ward (1960, 53), the National Security League was founded on December 1, 1914. The League focused on three primary concerns: the adequacy of America’s war preparedness, educational initiatives to promote patriotism, and the nation’s commitment to universal military training.

assignment with the American Fund for French Wounded (A.F.F.W.) – an organization that provided relief to wounded soldiers in France during World War I¹¹.

II

While the above factors collectively hindered Mead's quick completion of his book reviews, they did not stop him. His reviews of the Merz and Veblen volumes were completed and published in 1918, while the Wundt review was published in 1919¹².

Even if direct evidence were unavailable, a strong argument can be made on behalf of Mead's authorship solely based on the contents of the review. Reck (1964: lxxi) insisted that Mead's book reviews were significant because they furnished "valuable insights on the development of Mead's thought..." And, the Merz review is no exception, several ideas unique to Mead are noticeably on display in the Merz review.

The historian J. G. Randall (1937: 535) noted that "the study of thought... goes to the core of the historian's problem". Mead had taught a "history of thought" course at the University of Chicago for over twenty years. Certainly, Mead's preparations for and revisions of that course provided him with the specialized knowledge needed to write the anonymous review. Mead had perused Merz's earlier volumes, and both scholars were familiar with the work of the same nineteenth-century philosophers and scientists. A printed version of Mead's course was posthumously published in 1936, it was appropriately titled *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*¹³. Although Mead neither wrote nor edited the material contained in this volume, the assembled contents were based on a stenographic record of his lectures for the 1928 "history of thought" course¹⁴. Another record attesting to the content of Mead's "history of thought" lectures were notes taken by Irene Tufts Mead when she was a student in her future father-in-law's course during 1915¹⁵. A much earlier version of the course was recorded in the 1891 class notes of Eliza Sunderland. Sunderland's notes, however, were for John Dewey's rendition of "Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century", a philosophy course taught by Dewey at the University of Michigan¹⁶. Both Mead and Dewey taught at the University of Michigan in 1891 and became

11. Concerning his son, George H. Mead's trepidations were justified. Henry Mead was "seriously wounded" on August 16, 1918 as he was "attempting to put out a fire in an ammunition dump". For his heroic actions, Henry was awarded a Citation (Silver) Star. "Chicago's War Heroes", *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 2, 1918, 3.

12. Regarding the Veblen and Wundt reviews, see Mead (1918b: 752-762) and Mead (1919: 533-536) respectively.

13. See Mead 1936. Oelkers (2004: 361n21) attributed Mead's "keen historical interests" to "Wilhelm Dilthey's lectures on the 'History of Philosophy', which he attended in Berlin in the summer semester of 1891... Mead studied in Leipzig and Berlin from 1888 to 1891".

14. Readers were assured by Moore (1936: vii-viii) that "all the notes utilized in the preparation of this volume... may be regarded as verbatim recordings of Mr. Mead's lectures".

15. University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center, George Herbert Mead Papers, box 14, folder 6, holograph notes taken by Irene T. Mead, "Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century", 1915, taught by George H. Mead, 69 p.

16. University of Michigan Digital Library, Bentley Historical Library, Eliza Jane Read Sunderland Papers: 1865-1910, box 2, notebooks, "Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century", 1891, taught by John Dewey, 2 volumes.

close personal friends as well as colleagues. Three years later, in 1894, both scholars accepted positions in the Department of Philosophy, Psychology, and Pedagogy at the University of Chicago. Consequently, with three sets of lecture notes focused on the same topic, it should be possible to isolate and identify any themes that were of particular importance to Mead.

Camic examined thematic changes among the three sets of lecture notes by comparing notes from the 1891 (Dewey), 1915 (Mead), and 1928 (Mead) versions of the course. Three themes, according to Camic, clearly distinguished Mead's approach to the "history of thought" from Dewey's. More specifically, three themes that were either absent from or muted in Dewey's 1891 version of the course became noticeably salient in both the 1915 and 1928 iterations presented by Mead. The three themes were: first, the growing significance of science as research-based activity; second, the failure of past efforts to produce knowledge of the social world; and, third, the increasing importance of Darwin's view of evolution¹⁷. Because Darwinian evolution was not a topic particularly relevant to the anonymous review, it is omitted from the following discussion. However, the first and second themes played a prominent role in the review's critique of Merz, thereby providing additional evidence that the reviewer was George Herbert Mead.

Mead's review essay focused on the final, or fourth, volume of Merz's *History of European Thought in the Nineteenth Century*; however, Mead freely commented on all the volumes in the series, from the initial volumes tracing the history of scientific thought to the final volumes examining the development of philosophic thought. Overall, Mead found Merz's volumes of "great value", although Merz's discussion of scientific thought was deemed of greater interest and value than his survey of nineteenth-century philosophic thought¹⁸. According to Mead (1918a: 622), even the volumes devoted to scientific thought "revealed a philosophic attitude which affected" Merz's tendency to overestimate "the value of scientific theory". In *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, Mead (1936: 353) contended that "the history of science since the Renaissance is really a history of the research process". And, as Mead (1918a: 622) argued in his review, "since science has become self-consciously an undertaking of research, testing its progress solely by experiments, theory has lost that value which has belonged to it in philosophy and religious dogma".

A specific instance of Merz's "philosophic attitude" toward theory was found in the overemphasis he placed on the importance of the "energist's theory" in contributing to innovative research on the frontiers of scientific knowledge. Mead (1918a: 622) contested Merz's claim: "The theory of energy springs from the thermodynamic laws, themselves the outgrowth of the theory of the steam-engine, and has played little or no part in the later investigations gathering about the structure of matter..."¹⁹

17. The above is a description of the methodological procedures developed and used by Camic, and a truncated summary of the results of his research. See Camic (2013: 5-20).

18. Mead (1936: 251) characterized the two volumes that focused on scientific thought as "the best statement that you can get of the development of science throughout this period..."

19. The same limitation of the energist perspective was conveyed in Irene T. Mead's 1915 notes: "But energists [were] not on [the] frontier of scientific research". Irene T. Mead, box 14, folder 6, "Holograph notes", 38.

Mead's nexus of "steam engine", "theory of energy", and "thermodynamic laws" was a unique and durable example that he often used in other writings. Mead relied on the same example in his 1909 address at the Darwin Centenary, a commemoration held at the University of Chicago²⁰. The same example is used in three different chapters of the published version of *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*²¹. Basically, Mead argued that philosophical theorizing about the doctrine of energy did not function as a set of directions for understanding the steam engine. Conversely, an effort to understand and measure the work output of the steam engine led to the formation of the energy concept and the laws of thermodynamics. Moreover, both "the physicist and the chemist... made no use of the vision given in the mountains of the philosophy of energy"²². In *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, Mead (1936: 144) insisted that "the world is essentially a scientific world; and any philosophy which fails to express, to make use of scientific method, is a philosophy that is out of place"²³. Mead's critique of the "energist's theory" was distinctive. Other reviews that mentioned Merz's discussion of the energy doctrine characterized it as "remarkable for its lucidity" (Johnston 1905: 422), or as "an admirable account of the development of the doctrine of Energy [*sic*]" (Knott and Thomson 1905: 101).

From Mead's (1918a: 622) perspective, scientific theory should not be viewed as a functional alternative to religious or philosophic dogma. As dogma, science would be incapable of addressing new problems: "[A]nd it is only in meeting new problems that modern science is alive[,] inevitably new theory must arise". Treated inappropriately as dogma, Mead (1918a: 622) continued, scientific theory became a permanently fixed and final *terminus ad quem*, or a pre-existing answer to every conceivable question: "Finality in this field is neither a goal nor a desideratum". Mead (1936: 286) concisely expressed the same sentiments in *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*: "No statement that science makes is final".

Merz's fascination with and high regard for grand theory was most noticeable in his discussion of philosophic doctrines, according to Mead (1918a: 623). Scientific achievements during the nineteenth century had generated many new and often conflicting ideas. The challenge for philosophy was to develop a system of thought that made sense out of these disparate ideas. For Merz, philosophy's task was "to bring to systematic order the vast field of conflicting ideas which nineteenth century research has opened up" (Mead 1918a: 623). However, instead of the emergence of one or two dominant schools of thought, a bewildering array of eclectic philosophic orientations

20. University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center, George Herbert Mead Papers, box 10, folder 10, George H. Mead, "The World of Thought Before and After the Publication of the *Origin of Species*", 1909, typescript, 5-9.

21. See Mead (1936: Chapters 8, 12, 13).

22. George H. Mead, box 10, folder 10, "The World of Thought", 8.

23. According to Mead, pragmatism was the one school of philosophy that had "made use" of the scientific method: "Pragmatism makes a system of philosophy out of [the] scientific method". See Irene T. Mead, box 14, folder 6, "Holograph notes", 67; also see George H. Mead (1936: 354). Mandelbaum (1965: 63) noted that the close connection between science and philosophy was the "dominant interpretative theme" of Mead's *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*. Moreover, Mead (1936: 343) insisted that philosophy could interpret scientific results, but it could neither replace them nor offer alternatives to them.

contended for momentary supremacy. Without an all-encompassing philosophic doctrine, there was no “single comprehending structure where modern ideas may live at peace with one another” (Mead 1918a: 623). Mead noted that Merz’s preference for an all-encompassing system of thought explained his inordinately lengthy discussion of German idealism. The German idealists, Mead (1918a: 623) continued, erected “the most imposing structures of the century, but thought has refused to abide in them, and the historian of that thought must be willing to go with the uneasy changing mind of the time, without backward and lingering glances at the imposing but deserted dwellings which thought has abandoned”. Ultimately, Mead viewed Merz’s history of philosophic thought as a wistful lamentation over nineteenth-century philosophers’ failure to develop an enduring “single comprehending structure” of thought.

Because of his philosophic biases, Merz overlooked at least one significant intellectual development of the nineteenth century: “the advent of science in the field of social problems” (Mead 1918a: 623). Comte’s sociological version of positivism best exemplified “[t]he urge of men toward the most intricate, the most difficult of problems, that of society, and the demand that scientific method should be used here as it had been used in physical nature” (Mead 1918a: 623). Unfortunately, Comte’s insistence that a scientific approach be used in the study of society quickly fell into desuetude. As a consequence, the ideas of social theorists such as Comte and Spencer eventually resembled the dogmatic theories developed by other nineteenth-century philosophers. Nevertheless, Mead was confident that a social science amenable to the requirements of modern research science was possible. Mead (1918a: 623-624) suggested that the use of scientific methods in social research would yield results immediately useful in addressing several philosophical problems: “Not until the individual and the social group from which he arises have been restated in scientific fashion will it be possible to approach again the meaning of the problems of subjectivity and the objective world out of which man springs, with his subjective experience”. In another essay, Mead (1917b: 220) similarly claimed that before the empirical link between the social group and the individual could be properly restated in scientific terms, other philosophically oriented problems needed to be solved; namely, “the relation of the psychical [i.e., subjective] and the physical with the attendant problem of the meaning of the so-called origin of consciousness”. Mead postulated that “these problems must be attacked from the standpoint of the social nature of so-called consciousness”²⁴.

24. During the summer of 1919, Mead began working on what became an unpublished manuscript of thirty-six typed pages – subsequently, the manuscript was edited into three supplementary essays (i.e., Ia, II, and III) that were published in Mead 1934. Through his manuscript, Mead was determined to resolve some of the difficulties hindering a scientific analysis of human conduct. Writing to his daughter-in-law in late July, Mead acknowledged that several key ideas in the manuscript needed to be more rigorously clarified: “I have lived so long with these ideas in their partially developed stages and with the realization of their great import if they were developed that I am afraid of the process [of] working them out, but it has got to be done” (University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center, George Herbert Mead Papers, box 1, folder 17, Letter from George H. Mead to Irene T. Mead, July 22, 1919). More specifically, one of “the problems of subjectivity” was that the concept itself needed to be redefined. Subjectivity required a definition of the “private and psychical” that was not based on a solipsistic view of “individual experience” – that is, not based on a view of “individual experience” as unique, singular, and ineffable. Mead (1934: 339) viewed subjectivity as a product or

Throughout Merz's final volume, Mead (1918a: 624) found "expressions that belong to the period when philosophy was the handmaid of theology"²⁵. Mead noted, however, that his reservations about Merz's work were few and relatively minor. Mead (1918a: 624) concluded his review by describing Merz's effort as "a great work", "a valiant undertaking" of immense "value to the student and the thinker who would orient himself with reference to the thinkers of the past century".

In summary, a close reading of the anonymous review yielded two overarching criticisms of Merz. First, Merz paid scant attention to the research foundations of modern science. Instead, Merz embraced the all-encompassing, abstract explanations characteristic of much nineteenth-century philosophy. Second, Merz was unaware of another tributary of "thought" that first emerged during the nineteenth century. Merz never discussed the incipient efforts to foster a scientific understanding of social existence.

As demonstrated in *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century* and other writings, Mead was a tireless champion of the intelligent progress that resulted from a research-centered science. In addition, the scientific project of utmost importance to Mead was a careful scrutiny of the intricate relationship among the basic components of social life: society, self, and mind. Succinctly, ideas that the anonymous reviewer identified as important but absent from Merz's "history of European thought" were the same ideas conspicuously present in Mead's "movements of thought".

A content analysis of the anonymous review in combination with the documentary evidence described earlier leads to only one conclusion: George H. Mead was indeed the author of the unsigned review that appeared in the April, 1918 issue of the *American Historical Review*.

III

What follows is George Herbert Mead's review as it appeared in the *American Historical Review* 23, no. 3 (April 1918), 622-624²⁶.

consequence of social interaction: "[Insofar] as the individual is an object to himself in the same sense in which others are objects to him, his experiences do not become private and psychological. . . [E]ven that which attaches to the experience of one individual as distinguished from others is felt to represent a contribution which he makes to a common experience of all". Mead's reconceptualization was a radical break with the individualistic, consciousness-centered view of human subjectivity prevalent in much of the philosophy and psychology of that time. Believing it to be misguided, Mead rejected this conventional view. Instead, Mead and other pragmatists such as Dewey claimed that the interaction that took place between human beings "precedes subjectivity and is constitutive of it" (Biesta 1998: 74). Consequently, Mead transformed "subjectivity" into "reflective consciousness" (i.e., "the individual as object to himself") and, as Mead (1909: 407) noted in an earlier essay, "reflective consciousness implies a social situation which has been its precondition". In other words, reflective consciousness was not a "given", not a basic datum of human nature, but a consequence of social interaction.

25. Mead (1917a: 169-170) invoked the same phrase in his encomium for the philosopher Josiah Royce. For Royce, "philosophy was no longer the handmaid of theology nor the textbook for a formal logic and puritan [*sic*] ethics". During the medieval period, Scholastics such as Peter Damian (c. 1007-1073) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) characterized philosophy as *ancilla theologiae* (the handmaid of theology).

26. The authors gratefully acknowledge the *American Historical Review* and Oxford University Press [ahr.oxfordjournals.org/content/23/3/622.full.pdf+html] for permission to reprint in its entirety George H. Mead's review.

A History of European Thought in the Nineteenth Century. By John Theodore Merz. Volume IV. (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons. 1914. Pp. xii, 825. 20 sh.)

The continuation of Merz's history of philosophy in the nineteenth century – the fourth volume of his *History of European Thought in the Nineteenth Century* – completes the vast survey of reflective thought whose first volumes presented the strides and revolutions in scientific theory during the last century.

This treatment of philosophy has not equaled in interest or value his presentation of scientific doctrine. In the latter field Merz has told the story of the import of the unprecedented advances of scientific research and discovery. It was a story as yet untold in English. It had behind it his complete grip on scientific data and his sympathetic comprehension of the scientists' undertaking to build doctrines adequate to the achievement of their discoveries. Even here, however, Dr. Merz revealed a philosophic attitude which affected his estimate of the value of scientific theory. The dominant place he awarded to the energist's theory indicated that the universality of a theory overbalanced in his judgment its function on the frontiers of scientific research. The theory of energy springs from the thermodynamic laws, themselves the outgrowth of the theory of the steam-engine, and has played little or no part in the later investigations gathering about the structure of matter, those investigations which have sprung from the recent study of electricity and radio-activity. Perhaps a similar indication of failure of perspective in estimating the import of scientific attitude is found in the author's discussions of vitalism in the second volume of the history. This personal equation may be stated as a failure to accept fully the scientist's attitude toward his theory. Since science has become self-consciously an undertaking of research, testing its progress solely by experiment, theory has lost that value which has belonged to it in philosophy and religious dogma. The present perfection of the theory and the spread of its application give to it in science no title to permanence. Theory in scientific research serves only the function of the formulation and generalization of present scientific method. With new problems – and it is only in meeting new problems that modern science is alive – inevitably new theory must arise. Finality in this field is neither a goal nor a desideratum.

This attitude of Dr. Merz has but restricted importance in estimating the great value of his first two volumes. The materials are so fully presented within text and foot-notes that no one need fail to grasp the onward movement of organizing thought as it sought to command the multitudinous results of investigations and experiments. It has, however, a more serious aspect in the last two volumes, which deal with philosophic doctrine. Here we find the same generous recognition of all the thinkers in all the nations whose thought has played an essential part in the philosophy of the century. There is the same exhaustive [623] familiarity with the enormous literature, the same determined effort to comprehend, and the same freedom of vision from all the different standpoints of different peoples and social classes and religious attitudes. But the temper is changed. In the midst of the scientific achievements the enthusiasm of constant discovery inevitably accompanies even the historian of swiftly changing scientific hypotheses. In the field of philosophy the mind that seeks comprehension,

organization, and finality gazes with disappointment at the dismemberment of old systems, the early setting of the sun of German romantic idealism, and the seeming incapacity of modern philosophic thought to bring to systemic order the vast field of conflicting ideas which nineteenth-century discovery and research has opened up. The author assumes that systematic thinking must accomplish this task, but it has yet to be done. The German idealists undertook it, and their enthusiasm and daring for a while seemed adequate to the undertaking. But they belong to the first third of the century, and their reappearing in English and American neo-Hegelianism has lived as short a life. Nor has the positivism of Comte, nor the phenomenalism of Mill, nor the agnostic philosophy of Spencer, been able to erect the single comprehending structure where modern ideas may live at peace with each other. Dr. Merz assumes that some other colossal minds must achieve what neither Hegel nor Comte nor Mill nor Spencer could achieve. It is evident that such a demand on the historian's part must affect his treatment of his material and his estimate of its value. It is this frame of mind which explains the space given to the German idealists who strove to accomplish what is Dr. Merz's conception of philosophy's task. Not only are these thinkers presented once, but where their doctrines and spiritual influences are felt in other fields the author rehearses their undertakings. In the actual number of pages they occupy three times the space that should be accorded them. This is especially true because Dr. Merz is writing not a history of philosophic systems in these two volumes but of nineteenth-century thought as it is evidenced in philosophy. They are indeed the most imposing structures of the century, but thought has refused to abide in them, and the historian of that thought must be willing to go with the uneasy changing mind of the time, without backward and lingering glances at the imposing but deserted dwellings which thought has abandoned. For the same reason Dr. Merz has not sensed the import of the advent of science in the field of social problems. Comte's doctrine is also an imposing structure, but this mighty dwelling-place never really housed other European thought than his own. The structure was unimportant. The urge of men toward the most intricate, the most difficult of problems, that of society, and the demand that scientific method should be used here as it had been used in physical nature, was most significant. Perhaps more than anything else this demand has been responsible for the breakdown of the philosophic system-making, that Merz deplors. Not until the individual and the social [624] group from which he arises have been restated in scientific fashion will it be possible to approach again the meaning of the problems of subjectivity and the objective world out of which man springs, with his subjective experience. It is this insistent social problem as well as the inroads of biology into psychology that lies behind the uncertainties of mind and body. And this social problem finally is the form that religious thought is slowly taking. In a word Dr. Merz has not succeeded in presenting the often sunken obstacles against which philosophic speculation has split and the barriers that have sent single streams of thought abroad into many channels. For his pen, thinking is the domain of the observer, the contemplator, who if he fulfills the task of thought must bring all within an ordered landscape. It is not the method by which men ceaselessly seek solutions for their insistent changing problems.

This perhaps ungracious comment on a great work does not in any sense do justice to its value to the student and the thinker who would orient himself with reference to the thinkers of the past century. The full quotations, the always interesting foot-notes, the continual cross-references, the sustained style, make this volume valuable as have been those that preceded it, though the field has not the novelty in English which had that which his first two volumes traversed. In spite of his announced purpose to write the history of thought and not the history of philosophies, he has not been able to do more than give a competent and sympathetic account of philosophic doctrines, with much that is illuminating from the biographies of the philosophers. But though the determining factors in the direction of the streams of thought have been largely changed by social conditions, Dr. Merz has given his readers the resultants of these movements as they have crystallized in the minds of individual thinkers rather the stream in its living course.

It is more readable than are the histories of modern philosophy. It does not in the fashion of these treatises tease out the fibres[sic] of systematic doctrine, and it is comprehensive and appreciative. To be sure at times one meets, with wonder, expressions that belong to the period when philosophy was the handmaid of theology. For Merz materialism and agnosticism may be dangerous at times. The literature of thought which lacks the Anglo-Saxon restraint may be not only dangerous but evil. At the end of the chapters on the Unity of Thought and the Rationale of Thought the reader feels that the author is standing on the tower of an English cathedral looking for the philosophy that will again save God, immortality, and the freedom of the will, that will so reshape the world of science that the God of his fathers may return to it. And yet this is only a feeling Dr. Merz leaves with his readers, a feeling that attaches to the author rather than his work. It is a valiant undertaking to deal justly and sympathetically with all who have trod the speculative paths of his century.

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