OBITUARY

HANS REICHENBACH

Some months ago we were informed of the decease of Hans Reichenbach. He was without any doubt one of the most prominent figures in contemporary philosophy and his rich maturity still held great promises.

Originally he studied physics and was for a short time assistant to Erich Regener, the well-known physicist who did important work on radio-activity and afterwards on cosmic rays.

Later on Reichenbach's interest turned more to mathematics and still later to philosophy (particularly to the philosophy of mathematics and physics), and at last, also to symbolic logic. For some years he lectured on philosophy of science at Berlin University, but when the Nazi regime came into power in Germany in 1933, he was deprived of his post. Fortunately, he was among the broadly 30 professors of Jewish extraction which the Turkish government engaged at that time.

In Istanbul he stayed some 10 years as a professor of philosophy at the University. But his work did not meet with much response in that environment, so that he accepted with pleasure the invitation to undertake a charge at the University of California in Los Angeles. His work here satisfied him completely and he was very happy in his home in a splendid climate and quite close to the Pacific Coast.

He has written a number of works of great and lasting importance. After contributing some minor papers in the field of the theory of relativity: "Relativitätstheorie und Erkenntnis a priori" (The theory of Relativity and a priori Knowledge) (1920) and Axiomatik der relativistischen Raum-Zeit Lehre" (Axiomatics of the relativistic theory of Space-Time) (1924), he published in 1928 his monumental book: "Philosophie der Raum-Zeit Lehre" (Philosophy of the Space-Time Theory) (380 p.). In future no philosopher occupying him-

self with the fundamental problems of space and time and their interrelation should disregard this publication.

Then follows his second great work on probability problems. During the restraint on his publications from German side this was issued in 1935 by Sijthoff in Leyden under the title of „Wahrscheinlichkeitslehre" (Theory of Probability) (451 p.). In 1949 its second edition was published in English: "The Theory of Probability. An Inquiry into the Logical and Mathematical Foundations of the Calculus of Probability".

This work had also been preceded by shorter studies of which here will be especially mentioned the exceedingly interesting and very little known article in the Proceedings of the Bavarian Academy of Science, („Sitzungsberichte der bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften", 1925) on „Kausalstruktur der Welt und der Unterschied von Vergangenheit und Zukunft" (The Causal Structure of the World and the Difference between Past and Future).

The two great extensive publications indicated above evince a curious phenomenon which is prevalent among the thinkers of the period 1910–30 (e.g. also in Ernst Cassirer), namely their gradual shift from the Kantian aprioristic standpoint to the positivistic standpoint of Mach, Schlick, Carnap and the Viennese Circle in general (cf. Sjoerdma's thesis "From apriorism to positivism in physics", Amsterdam, 1948).

In his early important publications about concepts of probability and of space and time, Reichenbach wants to base himself on the Kantian apriorism, which afterwards he disowns. In his later work he only admits the positivistic foundation on experience, and he applies logistics to the elaboration of the newer ideas.

In his Californian period he occupies himself intensively with logistics and publishes also a text-book "Elements of Symbolic Logic". 1947 (441 p.)

In 1944 another important book by Reichenbach had appeared: "Philosophic Foundations of Quantum Mechanics" (182 p.), a book essentially fitting into the frame of modern times, on a subject about which Reichenbach could not possibly keep quiet. In 1949 a German edition of this book came out. Reichenbach proposes to solve the difficulties, which of recent years have arisen with regard to the duality of light by the acceptance of three-valued logics. It is doubtful however whether he has convinced his readers of the desirability of this solution. His approach is also rather complicated.

Now as to Reichenbach's last important book, "The Rise of scientific Philosophy" (333 p.). In this case as in that of his earlier

works, he had asked me to announce the book, a request wich would have been gladly complied with at once, had not during the previous year manifold other occupations prevented me from accomplishing this task. It is greatly to be regretted that his death occurred before the fulfilment of the promise. The omission will shortly be made up. Especially the chapter on "The nature of Ethics" is of a striking originality.

From the foregoing it will appear that Reichenbach still belonged to those immensely industrious and productive Germans, who never rest and whose works are extremely rich in new and profound ideas (like K. Fischer, W. Wundt, E. von Hartmann and similar thinkers).

A good number of smaller works has not yet been mentioned, as e.g. „Ziele und Wege der heutigen Naturphilosophie" (Aims and Methods of Contemporary Philosophy of Science) (1931) and „Von Kopernikus bis Einstein" (1937). Mention must also be made of the numerous articles in „Erkenntnis", the journal he edited together with Rudolf Carnap and which was devoted to studies on modern, or rather logical, positivism and related views.

Hans Reichenbach was a personality whose work will certainly prove to be of abiding value.

J. CLAY.