At the World Congress of Philosophy at Harvard in 1926 a young woman was heard to say gaily “And so Socrates is at the Congress!” Turning in the direction of her glance one saw a rugged man with beard and bald head who indeed reminded one strongly of the husband of Xantippe. It was Hans Driesch.

Who is Hans Driesch? He was born in Rhenish Prussia, educated at Freiburg, Munich, and Jena; from 1891 to 1900 he was at the Zoological station at Naples. He has been both private docent and professor extraordinary of philosophy at Heidelberg; in 1907 and 1908 he was Gifford lecturer at Aberdeen; in 1926-1927 he was visiting professor of philosophy at the University of Wisconsin. He has written extensively upon both biology and philosophy. He is chiefly known for his doctrine of vitalism.

The present book is an adequate translation of a paper-covered volume which was published in Leipzig two years ago under the title Der Mensch und Die Welt. It is a popular and very understandable presentation of his philosophical position. Briefly he accepts Descartes’ conclusion that we consciously experience something. Within the universe which we experience he discovers a dualism between the non-living within which we have mere summation and the living in which “totalizing wholes” prevail. On this dualism his vitalism is based. An organism is more than the sum of its parts; it is an original or “totalizing whole.” Materialism, he says, has tried to consider the organism as a mere sum of its physical and chemical constituents. Vitalism, on the contrary, introduces a new qualitative character in the whole. Life, then, and all spiritual things have as secure a place in the universe as do matter and energy.

One is disappointed to find Driesch, once he has justified the reality of life and spirit, going clear over to a sympathy with occultism. Clairvoyance, telepathy, prophecy, spiritualistic phenomena seem to find with him an uncritical acceptance. He further shakes our faith in him by extending his practical ethics to the point of discouraging the killing of animals for food.

But Driesch has cut a large enough figure in the thought of recent times to warrant reading this book. His insistence on the unique reality of life as against the dogmatic pretensions of naturalism has been valuable in spite of his speculative excesses. CHARLES M. PERRY.