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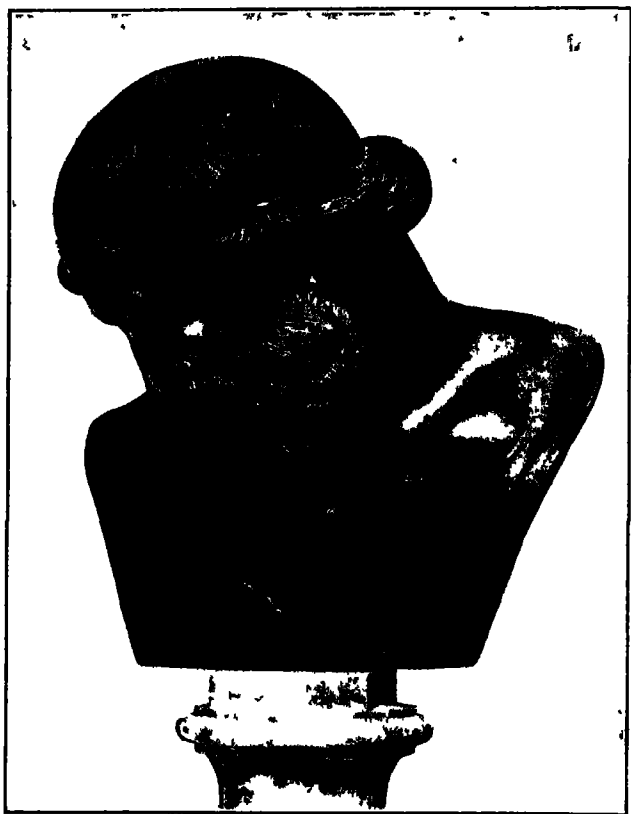
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# HISTORY OF ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

BY

A. W. BENN

AUTHOR OF "HISTORY OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY," ETC

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## CHAPTER I

### EARLY GREEK SPECULATION

PHILOSOPHY, both the name and the thing, is one of the gifts that we owe to ancient Greece. But the word, as commonly used among ourselves, has been more or less deflected from its original meaning. We do not always very clearly distinguish between the philosopher and the man of science—the specialist who devotes himself to the study of a particular branch of knowledge; nor do we sufficiently recognise the close relation in which philosophy, properly so called, stands to practice, to conduct. But the Greek thinker—Pythagoras or another—who first coined the word philosopher, that is, lover of wisdom, meant to suggest a distinction between desire and attainment. To love wisdom is not necessarily to possess her, nor even to be confident that one will ever succeed in possessing her. Wisdom again, although impossible without knowledge, is something more than mere knowledge, than that agreement of thought with fact which we call truth, it is the creation of ideals, and the reconstitution of human life in accordance with ideal claims. Plato, the supreme thinker of antiquity, has indeed called the philosopher “the spectator of all time and all existence”—a description that would seem to leave philosophy, as practice, out of sight; but if we read this grand utterance in the light of Platonism as a whole we must understand the totality of time and existence as embracing, beyond and above what now and here actually is or has been in the past, what is or ought to be.

Progress moves from a vague, confused, indefinite aggregate to a definite and differentiated whole. Among ourselves this truth is particularly associated with the name of Herbert Spencer; but it was originally a Greek idea, and it is equally verified by the evolution of Greek thought. The pioneers of philosophy were also to some extent scientific discoverers and moral or social reformers; while some at least won respect by the dignity of their personal character. The last point deserves particular notice, for some tradition of it has survived ever since. The world has always claimed more from philosophers than from men of professional distinction in science, art, and politics, demanding from them not only high intellect, but high character, a marked superiority to the vulgar weaknesses and ambitions which with those others may be overlooked for the sake of their eminent services to the community. In a word, self-consistency is felt to be a note of genuine philosophy. Not only must the teacher's theories agree with themselves, but also they must be carried out in his life.

Nevertheless, when all has been said, in philosophy, as in science, intellect and knowledge are the primary requisites, and the true philosopher finds his happiness in speculation rather than in practice. And even in the interests of practice it is well that this should be so; for the greatest and most fruitful ideas have ever resulted from the search after truth for its own sake, not for the uses to which it might be put. Now of all races the Greeks, and of all Greeks the Ionians, were most distinguished for this high intellectual curiosity. Already before the dawn of science we see it appearing as a characteristic trait in the Homeric poems, associated with habits of minute observation and with a singular lucidity of expression. Among the Homeric Greeks also there is a habit of free discussion, an envisagement of every situation from various points of

view, and a somewhat sceptical turn of mind, highly favourable to the discovery of truth, such as the early literature of no other people presents.

Philosophy, as we have seen, differs from the special sciences—geometry, astronomy, medicine, and the rest—first of all as the whole from the parts, as a general from a particular view of the world and of life. And just as a scientific explanation of this or that phenomenon by natural causation is at first hampered by the competition of popular superstition, so also philosophy, in seeking after a rational theory of the universe, finds the ground pre-occupied by the more or less elaborate mythologies that the religious imagination has constructed for its own satisfaction. Mythology is, indeed rather a by-product of religion, or even a parasitic growth on its trunk, than an essential element of its existence, but so far as experience goes the two are closely connected and apparently interdependent facts. Now the Greeks were in all places and at all periods of their history, with a few eminent exceptions, a notoriously superstitious people—much more so indeed than their Roman conquerors, their intellectual superiority to whom was in other ways so strongly marked. And, as it happened, out of their superstitions was evolved a mythology so beautiful in itself and so interwoven with the noblest creations of poetry and plastic art that it still survives as an element of priceless value in the tradition of civilised mankind. By a fortunate circumstance, however, the very constitution of Hellenism, the jealous Greek sense of local independence and personal liberty, prevented the rise of a theocracy like those which everywhere else except in some parts of Italy dominated the civilisation of the ancient world, and have continued to prolong their sway down to the present times. Priests were indeed a recognised class of Greek citizens, but they do not seem to have been much respected, nor did they ever acquire such an

intertribal organisation as might have opposed an effectual barrier to the spread of secular thought. Still, as we shall have occasion to observe through the whole of this narrative, Greek religious feeling operated very powerfully to arrest or deflect the normal development of Greek philosophy.

*The Ionian Cosmologists. Thales, Anaximander,  
Anaximenes.*

All our authorities are agreed in naming as the founder of Greek philosophy Thales of Miletus, a rich and powerful Ionian city on the western coast of Asia Minor. The date of this remarkable thinker is fixed by the credible tradition that he predicted a total eclipse of the sun, known to have occurred in the year 585 B.C. Besides being, to that extent, an astronomer, Thales was a geometrician, an engineer, and a statesman, whose advice, had they acted on it, might have been the political salvation of his countrymen. But his true title to glory did not meet with full recognition until two centuries later. Then the subsequent development of philosophy taught men to see that its speculations took their start from his proposition that water was the first principle of all things. What exactly Thales meant by saying this, or by what considerations, if any, he attempted to justify it, can only be conjectured. Experience shows that many things pass out of sight by being dissolved in water; while many others, including rocks, plants, and animals, seem to owe their origin or their nutriment to its presence. It would be a great triumph for modern science to show that all material things were composed of electrons or of ether; but it would not be philosophy, for such a derivation would not solve the problem of existence. We should still be asking, how came the primary atoms to combine into material substances; whether

our consciousness of those substances is material; and if not, whence did it arise? But these are questions that did not trouble Thales or his successors for many years afterwards; and yet his principle was truly philosophic, because it did not exclude more detailed inquiry; and it suggested the methods of reason and experience by which a solution might be attempted when those ulterior problems came up for examination.

Early Greek thought recognised other elements besides water, indeed, earth, air, and fire still figure as such in popular language, and it will be seen that one or other of these did subsequently put in a claim to be regarded as the first principle of things. An *a priori* theorist would conclude that the competition for that honour must have begun directly after the way was opened by Thales. Unfortunately for theory, we find his immediate successor in the school of Miletus, Anaximander, taking an entirely new departure, and what some might call a much higher flight. He tells us that all the heavens and all the worlds they contain have originated neither from water nor from any other element, but from the Infinite—a fateful term which he first introduced into philosophy. And he goes on to state in somewhat mystical phraseology that into that from which things take their rise they pass away once more, “as is ordained; for they make reparation and satisfaction to one another for their injustice according to the appointed time.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, judging from what is otherwise known about him, Anaximander was no mystic, but a genuinely scientific thinker. He is credited with having invented various astronomical instruments, or at any rate with having first introduced them into Greece, and with having constructed the first map. He taught that the earth had originally passed from a fluid to a solid state, and that human beings were developed out of an aquatic animal. His

<sup>1</sup> I quote from Professor Burnet's translation, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 2nd ed., p. 54.

theories on the subject are crude enough; the important thing is that he should have employed the method of physical evolution as opposed to the method of supernatural creation. And this makes it seem the more remarkable that his highest speculations should be touched with a mystical pessimism according to which all individual existence is an injustice, or, in more modern language, a mistake, a mere transitory wave on the surface of an infinite monotony.

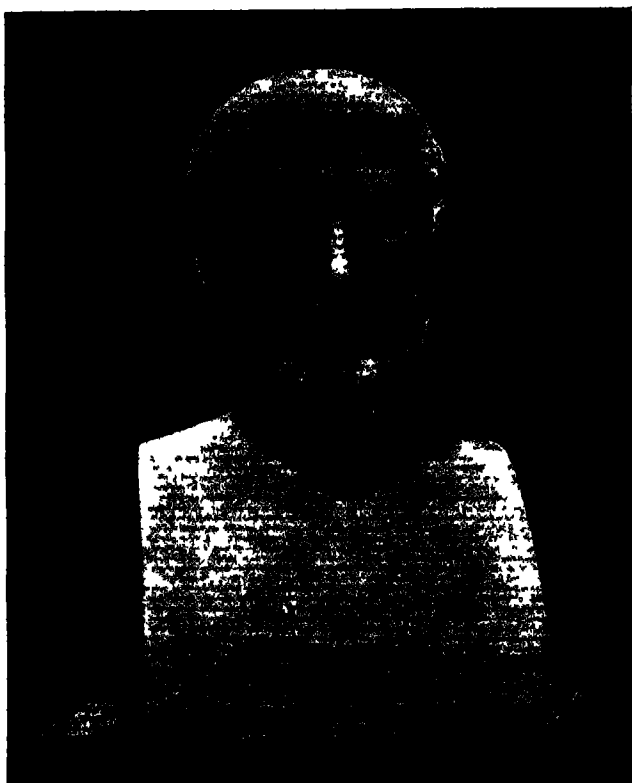
The explanation of this anomaly is, I believe, to be found in the presence and pressure of a great religious revival which was passing over the whole Hellenic world at the time when Anaximander wrote—that is, about the middle of the sixth century B C.—a revival probably due to the democratic tendencies of the age, the rise into power of the agricultural and commercial classes, who brought with them religious beliefs and practices of a more gloomy and passionate character than those of the pleasure-loving, dissolute aristocracies whom they displaced. Homer's heroes find their ideals in the gods of upper air, the personified celestial luminaries who lead, on the whole, a life of never-ending and unwearying felicity. Human life might be sacrificed for patriotic motives or for the hope of everlasting glory among posterity, but death in itself was an unmingled evil, and an existence beyond the grave, if any, less desirable than the most degraded of earthly conditions. The Greek peasant, on the other hand, closely associated through all his years with the processes of vegetation, and finding the objects of his worship in the divine personifications of those subterranean powers by which vegetation is perpetually sustained and renewed, came to look on those divinities as subject like himself to death, but also on himself as destined like them to a renewed existence—not, indeed, on earth, but elsewhere. More especially bread and wine, the gifts of Demeter and Dionysus, emerging as they did with higher

vitalising powers from what seemed the annihilating ordeal of the corn-mill and the wine-press, gave as nothing else could the mystic pledge of some higher life beyond the grave. Nor was the new movement limited to this enhanced faith in human immortality. Morality being so much more the interest of the industrial classes than of the idle rich, the increasing importance of those classes would anyhow have created a stronger demand for justice and temperance. And that demand would inevitably seek for support in the new religion of immortality by imagining a system of retributive sanctions for the merits or demerits of this life in the life to come.

The religious movement spread rapidly from the lower to the higher classes of the Greek world, and ere long became a dominant influence in literature and art. We may suppose, then, that Anaximander was giving such ideas their highest philosophic generalisation when he proclaimed justice as the supreme cosmic law, and when he spoke of the infinite worlds in space and time as gods arising and perishing for ever. To regard all individual existence as in itself a wrong is an extreme of altruism going beyond the teachings of Buddhism, for that religion condemns egoism on egoistic grounds as a source of unhappiness to the individual himself. Still, there is a certain likeness between the teaching of Sakya-Muni and the teaching of Anaximander which might suggest the presence of Oriental influences in Asia Minor were it not that a slight priority in the date of the Milesian philosopher, combined with the enormous distance of India, puts any such derivation out of the question. Nor need we suppose that Anaximander looked forward to the complete disappearance of all existence as a desirable or likely consummation. Within the Infinite as such there is no injustice, and the never-ending redressal of whatever injustice shows itself in the limited and partial existence of finite worlds is the driving-force

that makes the wheels of evolution go round. The theory was a fantastic form for ethical reflection to take, but it proves at what an early date the sense of justice made itself felt in Greek philosophy.

With the third and last of the Milesian school, Anaximenes (about 546 B.C.), we return to a more concrete and scientific method of speculation. Retaining the idea of an infinite Substance whence all things—the gods themselves included—are formed, he identifies this universal element with the air we breathe. In a rarefied form it appears as fire, in a condensed form as water and earth. That was the last word of Milesian philosophy, and not long after its utterance the heroic resistance of Miletus to the Persian invaders ended in its destruction. But the barbarian conquest, so far from extinguishing the spirit of free inquiry, only gave it a wider dissemination, for Ionian fugitives carried the speculative impulse of their race to new homes in the western Mediterranean, where we shall now have to study it as represented first of all by the Pythagorean school



PYTHAGORAS

(*W. A. Mansell & Co.*)

## CHAPTER II

### THE PYTHAGOREANS, HERACLEITUS, AND THE ELEATICS

PYTHAGORAS is at once a legendary and a historical figure. We know from the testimony of credible authorities—some of them his contemporaries—that there was such a person, that he was an Ionian born in Samos in the first half of the sixth century B C., that he founded a famous school in southern Italy, and that he ended his life there—how we cannot certainly tell, but probably at an advanced age. No authentic writing of his has been preserved, nor can we be sure how much of the doctrines held by his disciples owe their origin to the master. But we know of the Pythagorean teaching in general that it combined mysticism with science, and that its aims were at an early period highly practical, being directed towards the reformation both of private and of public life. More certainly than in the case of Anaximander can we associate the school of Pythagoras with that great religious revival to which attention has been already drawn as a leading feature of sixth-century Hellenic life and thought. Immortality in particular took a foremost place among the Pythagorean doctrines, being held under the form of metempsychosis, or the migration of the animating principle after death from animals, and even plants, to human bodies, and *vice versa*. Such a belief, as we know, forms part of the primitive animistic philosophy, and is still held by the lowest races of mankind. We may suppose,

therefore, that it survived among the ancient populations whom the Greeks had originally conquered and more or less imperfectly Hellenised. The singular thing about the Pythagorean school is that they should have combined the belief in metempsychosis with the assiduous study of mathematics, for at first sight nothing would seem more inconsistent with animistic superstition than familiarity with the methods of mathematical demonstration. A solution of the difficulty may, perhaps, be found in the habit of regarding numbers and geometrical figures as separable entities constituting the very essence of the bodies to which they are temporarily attached, while at the same time able to pass freely from one body to another. The Pythagoreans went a step further than this when, in opposition to the Ionian materialism, they declared that numbers were the very substance of which all things were made. Their distrust of sensible appearances and their free use of the scientific imagination ultimately led to that revolution in astronomy by which the sun was substituted for the earth as the centre of the planetary system.

As a factor, however, in early Greek thought more importance belongs to the Pythagorean system of opposites. A table of antithetical couples was drawn up in their school, the most notable of which were. The Limit and the Unlimited, The One and the Many, Rest and Motion; Light and Darkness, Good and Evil. Of these contrasts, the last-mentioned is, so to speak, the ethical interpretation of the others. We shall presently see what a powerful influence was exercised on the subsequent course of Greek speculation by this idea of an all-pervading antithesis in nature. But to understand its working we must look back to the origin of another school by which the intellectual activity of Ionia was extended to southern Italy.

*Xenophanes.*

Xenophanes of Colophon (about 540 B.C.), an Ionian city on the coast of Asia Minor, a contemporary of Pythagoras, was the first Greek philosopher who wrote in poetry. Unlike most of his countrymen, he had no sympathy with the prevalent rage for athletics, thinking that the honours and rewards lavished on the successful competitors in the great games might more fitly be bestowed on didactic singers like himself. Nor did the teaching of the great classic poets escape his satire. "Homer and Hesiod," he complains, "have ascribed to the gods all things that are a shame and a disgrace among mortals—stealings and adulteries and mutual deceptions." Although not exactly immoral, the ordinary anthropomorphic view of the gods is grotesque. The negro imagines them as black, the northern barbarian as red-haired and blue-eyed. So if horses and oxen had the necessary skill, they would paint gods like themselves. As a foe to all anthropomorphism, Xenophanes seems to have stood aloof from the new Orphic religion, with its worship of a suffering and dying god. There is a story that, when the Eleates asked him should they sacrifice to Leucothea and mourn for her or not, he advised them not to sacrifice to her if she was human, and not to mourn for her if she was divine.

Nevertheless, the philosophy of this poet-sage was touched by the spirit of the age with a distinctly religious colouring. For him, the primordial element, conceived by Thales as water and by Anaximenes as air, was earth; and this he described as extending downwards to infinity. Yet this unmeasured material mass is described as being the one supreme God, omniscient, omnipotent, and conscious through his whole extent. Here we have the crude undifferentiated thought out of which pantheism and monotheism, spiritualism and materialism, were afterwards to be developed.

*Heracleitus*

So far three elements—water, air, and earth—had successively been chosen as the primordial substance of things, each being probably recommended for the position by the vast extent of its diffusion and by its necessity as a support for life. It was reserved for a greater philosopher than any of those we have yet encountered, Heracleitus of Ephesus (about 502 B C), to give this place to the fourth element, fire. It has been conjectured that the idea came to him from the Persian religion, with its worship of fire. But a Greek would despise the Barbarians of upper Asia too much to borrow from them, even if he had the curiosity to make himself acquainted with their religion. And Heracleitus had a very poor opinion of learning as such. The most erudite men of that age—among whom he mentions Pythagoras and Xenophanes—had only perverted their understanding by the extent of their reading and the variety of their researches. Yet his own originality was not complete if, as seems likely, at least the suggestion of fire as the most universal element came to him from Anaximander. For that philosopher taught that the heavenly bodies were merely openings in vast revolving rings of fire. Thus fire, although we have so little of it here, is for amount as well as for power the predominating element in nature—and what counted for most with a Greek—the limiting, enclosing principle of the universe. For the new system, besides being the circumference, it is also the centre of things, in the sense that our life and reason are constituted by fire. We are told that once, when certain strangers came to visit Heracleitus, they found the illustrious thinker warming himself by a stove; and, on their hanging back shyly, he bid them enter boldly, “for here also there were gods”—in reference, as we must suppose, not only to the material source of heat, but also to his own soul.

Heracleitus, indeed, recognised no other divinity than this radiant principle of thought and things. "This universe, the same for all, was not made by any god or any man, but was and is and ever shall be an ever-living fire, kindled and quenched by measure." According to our way of thinking, when a fire is quenched it is no longer a fire. But for Heracleitus the primal substance preserved its identity through every transformation. And this idea led him on to the still more general principle that opposites are always and everywhere the same, that self-contradiction is the very law and life of things, the spring that makes the world go round. If this is madness, there is a method in it. As in modern chemistry the elements combine with one another in definite proportions, so, according to Heracleitus, their transformations are determined by a strict quantitative rule. There is, indeed, a new sun every day, but "the sun must not transgress his measures, or the Erinyes of justice will find him out." The meaning, we may suppose, is that the hours of sunshine and the amounts of heat and light poured out during those periods vary within certain limits prescribed by natural law.

The Greek commonwealths distinguished themselves from the Asiatic despotisms by their exclusive and punctilious obedience to law. Such, at least, was the ideal that their best citizens strove to maintain. And this spirit of orderly obedience, becoming conscious of itself in Greek philosophy, discovered in the material universe "its own vast shadow glory-crowned." Philosophy was partly right and partly wrong. There are, indeed, laws of nature, but they are not exactly laws of justice, nor the best models for our imitation. The blind struggle for existence, which, as we are now beginning to see, is the law, not only of the organic world, but of the inorganic world also, has led to great things, and among others to greater things than itself—to mercy and love. Now, the wonderful genius of

Heracleitus—a prophet, if ever any man deserved the name—shows itself not least in this: that he recognised both facts, the reign of force and the reign of law, while feeling at the same time that a reconciliation between them must somehow be possible. We find him denouncing Homer for the prayer that strife might perish from among gods and men. For “war is common to all and strife is justice, and all things come into being and pass away through strife.” Yet elsewhere he insists on our “holding fast to what is common to all as a city holds fast to its law; for all human laws are fed by the one divine law.” And what he thought of anarchic individualism is shown by the saying that “we must follow the common [interest?]; yet the many live as if they had a wisdom of their own”; and that “it is not good for men to get all they wish to get.” Even a unanimous vote directed against a single citizen may be wrong, as when the Ephesians banished Hermodorus, the best man among them—for no better reason than that he *was* the best. It is difficult indeed to see how the Ephesians or anyone else can do wrong if, as our philosopher elsewhere proclaims, “to God [i.e., from the highest point of view] all things are fair and good and right, although men hold some things wrong and some right.” The solution lay in his own doctrine of relativity and evolution pushed a step further. The very flux which he proclaims bears us on from the neutrality of nature to the morality of man.

### *The Eleatic School*

We have seen how Xenophanes in the course of his wanderings stopped at the Greek-Italian city of Elea. His residence there must have been somewhat prolonged, as he gained sufficient authority with the people for them to value his opinion on questions of religion. His philosophy also seems to have attracted

the attention of the foremost mind in this remote Ionian colony, the daring young thinker Parmenides (about 490 B.C.), who may also have learned from him the new method of clothing speculation in verse.

It will be remembered that Xenophanes, departing from the example of his Milesian predecessors, substituted the solid earth for the more mobile elements, water and air, as the substance of which the world is made, while at the same time, like Anaximander, he conceived this primordial substance as infinite in extent. But his rather crude ideas had hardly begun to circulate when a momentous scientific discovery came to give them the lie. This was no less than that our earth is a sphere freely suspended in space. It appealed strongly to the Greek passion for limitation, for finite intelligible form, and it was at once taken up with enthusiasm by Parmenides, who with the generalising instinct of all philosophy proceeded to evolve from the great paradox of geography other paradoxes which had the disadvantage of being not only false, but inconceivable.

Properly to appreciate the Eleatic philosophy we must think of it not only as developed by immediate suggestion from the cosmology of Xenophanes, but also, in a characteristically Greek way, by the spirit of contradiction from the cosmologies of the Pythagoreans and of Heracleitus. We have seen how the Pythagoreans set up a series of antithetical couples—the Limit and the Unlimited, the One and the Many, Rest and Motion, Light and Darkness, with Good and Evil for their ethical interpretation—as the general scheme of what is. And we have also seen how Heracleitus returned to pure Monism by simply decreeing the identity of these fancied opposites in the universal flux of being. Now in so doing he left one important category out of account—namely, Rest, which absolutely refuses to be identified with Motion; and, in fact, he made this last, symbolised as Fire, the

sole surviving reality. Parmenides took precisely the opposite course. He proclaimed that the world was not only what the new astronomy showed it to be—finite—but continuous, homogeneous, eternal, and eternally at rest. In the magnificent prologue to his great epic on Nature, a few fragments of which alone survive, the poet-thinker represents retributive justice as holding the keys of the palace of Truth. Heraclitus also had given the goddess a cosmic mission as the avenger of excess. And now we find the same justice brought in by implication to drive Motion into temporary exile, reinstating Rest as the truest truth of things.

Parmenides has been called a Materialist. But what he had in his mind as the bottom fact of existence was rather pure space than matter. Space is really what he declares all existence to be—continuous, homogeneous, transparent, and immovable. It is more remarkable that, after refining down existence to pure limited extension, he should proceed to identify it with pure reason or thought. But in this he was only following the lead of Xenophanes and of all the earlier Greek thinkers who, by an animistic survival, had invested the primordial substance with a consciousness of some sort. What differentiates Parmenides from his predecessors is that, while they distinguished body from soul in the universe as in man, he declares them to be one and the same. But this identification was necessitated by the first principle of his philosophy, the denial that difference and plurality can exist, or even that they can be conceived.

Readers of Herbert Spencer will remember how freely the argument from "inconceivability of the opposite" is employed in establishing the first principles of his philosophy as *a priori* certainties. People who professed themselves able to think of a creation of energy as perfectly possible were silenced by the

epigram, "They only think they think it." Parmenides is equally positive, but unluckily he gives away his whole case by constructing a sort of popular cosmology on the Pythagorean model, in which plurality, motion, darkness, negation, and other unthinkables are reinstated for the benefit of the vulgar. The fateful antithesis of Appearance and Reality thus made its entry for the first time on the speculative stage.

As might have been expected among such a satirical people as the Greeks, the paradoxes of Parmenides excited a good deal of ridicule on their first publication. But he was not, any more than Berkeley, to be vanquished by a grin. His younger friend and fellow-townsmen, Zeno (about 465 B.C.), came to the rescue with a number of picturesque arguments going to show that to assume the reality of motion involves us in as absurd consequences as to deny it. In this connection it will be enough to quote the celebrated puzzle of Achilles and the tortoise. Achilles, the swiftest-footed of beings, runs a race with the slowest; yet, giving the animal a start, say, of ten feet, he cannot overtake it. For supposing Achilles to run ten times as fast as the tortoise, while he is covering ten feet the tortoise will have covered one, while he is covering that one the tortoise will have advanced one tenth of a foot, and—space being infinitely divisible—so on for ever. An attempt has been made to meet this difficulty by bringing the equally infinite divisibility of time into account. But a problem is not solved by restating it in terms of another problem. The trouble is to understand how infinity, whether of space or time, can ever run itself out. Such considerations have led later philosophers than the Eleates to deny the reality of space and time altogether.

The Eleatic school gained a single adherent in eastern Hellas, Melissus of Samos (444 B.C.). This eminent man, of whom it is recorded that he defeated

the Athenians in a great sea-fight, has the distinction of being the only sailor, and, indeed, if I am not mistaken, the only commander, either by sea or land, that ever displayed any aptitude for original thought. He agreed with Parmenides in denying that reality moves or changes or is composed of differing parts, but asserted as against the master that the world is infinite in extent besides being eternal in duration

For three generations after its first start Greek thought had been steadily shaping itself into a philosophy of evolution with the promise of fruitful direction to physical science, so far as physical investigation could then be pushed. But evolution, to be conceivable, requires us to view the world under two opposite yet inseparable aspects, of which neither is intelligible without the other. We must think of nature as a permanent substance persisting through all changes, and we must think of it as passing through a series of never-ending transformations. Now what made Greece, and especially Ionian Greece, so great was the fearless individualism of her foremost men, and this had in practical life as its characteristic weakness a tendency to revolt against discipline, in speculation a tendency to false extremism, in both to an internecine warfare of ideals most unfavourable to the steady growth of power and of knowledge. The result in philosophy was a dangerous crisis, threatening it with bankruptcy and ruin. The Pythagoreans had ranged its highest categories in irreconcilable opposition to one another. Heracleitus, if he did not himself dissolve away all certainty in the universal flux, at any rate seriously compromised it by his identification of opposites, and his disciple Cratylus is reported to have renounced the use of spoken language altogether, limiting his utterances to the movement of a finger. The Eleatic school might reasonably have adopted the same method, in so far as predication involves the admission of difference, which they

## 20 PYTHAGOREANS, HERACLEITUS, ELEATICS

denied; only that it would have committed them to the reality of motion, which their philosophy equally excluded.

Fortunately, the resources of the Greek genius were not exhausted, and a number of independent thinkers of less genius indeed, but of more impartial outlook than their predecessors came to save philosophy from the deadlock to which it had been apparently condemned.

CHAPTER III  
GREEK PHYSICAL PHILOSOPHY IN THE  
FIFTH CENTURY B.C. . EMPEDOCLES,  
THE ATOMISTS, ANAXAGORAS, AND  
DIOGENES OF APOLLONIA

*Empedocles.*

EMPEDOCLES OF ACRAGAS (472 B.C.) was not immediately connected with Pythagoreanism, but he shared some leading beliefs of the school, and, like its founder, he occupies a rather ambiguous position in the history of philosophy. In what we are told of his personal history, he figures as an unscrupulous party-leader, the very considerable fragments of his metrical compositions that have survived exhibit him on the one side as a speculative thinker of brilliant and powerful imagination, on the other as a mystagogue and a charlatan—a circumstance for which his environment is to some extent accountable. He belonged to the Dorian race, whose intellectual inferiority left it more exposed than the Ionian to mystical aberrations, while the comparative isolation of his native city, Acragas, from the central stream of Hellenic culture and its nearness to the Semitic sphere of influence rendered its inhabitants an easier prey to Oriental superstition. Empedocles, at any rate, accepted the doctrine of metempsychosis to the extent of remembering that he himself had previously existed as a boy and a girl, a bush, a bird, and a fish; that is to say, he had wandered through all the various-life-

sustaining elements in turn. Whenever he walked abroad men and women surrounded him in crowds, praying for revelations of divine truth and for deliverance from their diseases. They might well crown him with flowers as an immortal god, for such in truth he had once been, until as a punishment for mingling in some strife, accompanied, as would seem, by bloodshed, he was driven forth to expiate his guilt in exile from the abodes of the blessed. There is a legend that our philosopher ended his career by plunging into the burning crater of Etna, in the hope that his disappearance from earth might be explained as a return to his lost place among the gods. Unfortunately for the reputation of Empedocles, the circumstances of his fraudulent suicide became known by the ejection of one of his brazen sandals from the volcano. But this strange act of self-immolation, if it really happened, becomes more intelligible if we interpret it as intended to complete the process of expiation for ante-natal sin. For we are told that the sinful dæmon in the course of his transmigrations is rejected by all the four elements in turn, and in particular that Earth casts him into the blazing Sun—that is, into Fire. Now, it will be remembered that Empedocles, while specifying Earth, Air, and Water as having been inhabited by him in former states of existence, makes no mention of Fire. Is it not, then, probable that he counted on completing the fated cycle of atonement in the burning bosom of Etna as the last step to the final resumption of his seat among the gods?

The doctrine of the Four Elements serves as a link between the mystical religion and the scientific cosmology of Empedocles. Water, air, earth, and fire had been successively set up by his predecessors, Thales, Anaximenes, Xenophanes, and Heracleitus, as the material Absolute, the source of all things. With the speculative weakness of a Dorian, he admits all four as co-equal principles of existence. His true service to

philosophy lies in having been the first to state clearly that what men call coming into being or passing out of it is really nothing but the union and separation of pre-existing elements. In this way the eternal self-identity of Parmenides and the perpetual flux of Heracleitus were recognised and reconciled as partial aspects of a single truth. Moreover, the Sphere of Parmenides found admission into the Sicilian scheme as one phase in the circle of being, the united whole whence the variety of things known to experience has arisen. And we may trace the Ephesian influence also in the great place given by our eclectic to Strife as a cosmic power; for it was through her that the Many came forth from the One. But Empedocles goes beyond Heracleitus and improves on him when, besides the dispersive agency of Strife, he introduces a new force into nature under the name of Love, with effects somewhat resembling those attributed to universal gravitation in modern science. Love is responsible not only for the pairing of animals, but for all the unifying processes now going on through the universe; and at a future epoch in the revolutions of the great cosmic cycle, Love, victorious and dominant, will reconstitute the perfect Sphere once broken up by Strife.

Mythology maintained so strong a hold on the imagination of the Sicilian philosopher that, not content with picturing the natural forces of attraction and repulsion as conflicting divinities, he goes on to conceive them as material substances, differing only from the four elements as active from passive constituents of nature. Thus the number of elements is increased from four to six, and by a rather clumsy arrangement all six are to find a place in the harmony of the reunited Sphere. Nevertheless, in his religious poem, Empedocles describes the Supreme God, in terms approaching the language of pure spiritualism, as inaccessible to sight or touch, "a sacred and

unutterable mind, flashing through the whole world with rapid thoughts "

We have seen how Empedocles figured among his contemporaries as a sort of medicine-man or miraculous healer. Like others of the kind, he had devoted considerable attention to botany and physiology, probably with the result of learning all that could then be known about the sciences of life. It is interesting to find that in speculating about the origin of animals he stumbled on the survival of the fittest in an embryonic form of the idea. His notion is that the different parts of the animal body were at first spontaneously and separately evolved, that under the influence of Love the scattered organs united in all sorts of chance combinations, and that such of these as were not capable of supporting themselves perished, leaving as survivors only those structures which were accidentally adapted to the conditions of existence.

Empedocles has also a theory of perception remarkable for its approach to the ideas of a more advanced philosophy. According to him, all bodies are constantly emitting streams of minute particles from their surfaces. These make their way into the correspondingly minute pores with which the organs of sense are provided, and thus give rise to the appropriate perceptions of each, as sight, smell, and so forth. The minute subdivision of matter beyond the limits of visibility was a fifth century (B C) discovery, the origin and application of which we have now to consider.

*The Atomists : Leucippus and Democritus.*

Aristotle has raised the question why water, air, and fire, rather than earth, should each in its turn have been chosen by some philosopher as the first principle of things. The assertion is not strictly true, for we

have seen that Xenophanes, for one, named earth as the material Absolute. Practically, it made little or no difference which element was thought of as occupying the first place; for in any case it would have to be convertible into the other elements, and the other elements back into it. Heraclitus, for example, had described fire in terms of reciprocal transformation. Like gold in commerce, it is the universal medium of exchange. After him the question arose how such a transformation was possible. Empedocles gave it up as insoluble, or rather he denied the process altogether, declaring that the four elements preserved their individuality through all the revolutions of nature. Meanwhile, a much profounder intellect, Leucippus (about 480 B.C.), an Ionian of uncertain origin, took up the problem where Heraclitus had left it, and found an answer in the constitution of that very element which, according to Aristotle, had been neglected by all other philosophers. We owe to this marvellous genius the most fruitful of all Greek physical notions, the notion of the atom, a hard, solid, indivisible particle of matter, so minute as to be invisible, yet of eternal duration, and capable of entering by aggregation into the constitution of the largest cosmic masses. Now, by its seeming solidity the atom is clearly more akin to earth than to the other elements. Indeed, we still talk familiarly of an earthy body's being "knocked to atoms," whereas the expression would be regarded as inappropriate if applied to a mass of water, air, or fire. And our experience of dust supplies a constant example of how earth can be reduced to a state of fine comminution, while the formation and drying up of mud is an object-lesson in the reconstitution of larger bodies from almost invisible particles. The coagulation of air into clouds—not easily distinguishable from dust-clouds in their appearance—would easily suggest an ultimate identity of composition; while

the transition from clouds to rain, snow, hail, and ice would bring water within the range of atomic interpretation. Fire would offer greater difficulties; but the sparks with which it frequently begins and ends might well be supposed to give a glimpse of what lay beyond the limits of visibility in the mysterious processes that brought lightning from the cloud, flame from the faggot, and rays from the sun. Moreover, fire visibly reduces bodies to dust, and, therefore, according to the primitive assumption that effects must resemble their causes, there must be something dusty in the nature of fire itself.

It appears that, according to Leucippus, the atoms differed in shape and size, and that these differences led to a corresponding variety of movement. The result was a process of segregation, by which the smaller and rounder atoms were brought together in such a way as to form a sort of outer skin, answering to the rotatory celestial sphere of primitive Greek astronomy, within which were enclosed the coarser and more angular particles of which our terraqueous world is composed. All is the work of a purposeless mechanism with which neither the supreme harmony of Heracleitus, the reason of Parmenides, nor such half-conscious agencies as the Love and Strife of Empedocles are concerned.

The conception of atoms implied as its correlative the conception of a void space in which they could freely move; and this also is due to Leucippus. He seems to have put it forward under the paradoxical form of something that both is and is not, declaring, in express opposition to Parmenides, who had denied not only the existence but the conceivability of not-being, that *naught* exists as much as *aught*. And, in fact, we have seen that the pure being of Parmenides only becomes intelligible when it is viewed as reproducing the attributes of pure space—attributes among which plurality, variety, and movement are not

included. These were now fully represented by the atoms, leaving immobility, continuity, and transparency as distinguishing characteristics of the void through which they whirled.

In this way the atomic theory seemed happily to reconcile the Eleatic philosophy with common sense, while at the same time it elucidated the nature of those transformations which Heracleitus had assumed, without explaining by what mechanism they were effected. Nevertheless, atomism had little success among the Greek philosophers, and none in Greek science—a fact to which its victorious revival in modern chemistry is apt to make us rather blind. It is true that Leucippus found a worthy successor in Democritus of Abdera (460–361 B.C.), an encyclopædic genius who spent his unusually prolonged life in applying the ideas of his great teacher to the whole range of his multifarious acquisitions. It is true also that atomism found a place in the philosophy of Epicurus, and a brilliant literary exposition in the great poem of the Roman Epicurean, Lucretius. But these illustrious thinkers remained lamentably ignorant of the astronomical discoveries by which Greek science was revolutionised even in the lifetime of Democritus, leaving their cosmological speculations as antiquated rubbish in which no properly educated student could interest himself except as a historical curiosity. Besides, there was something in the plastic Greek genius to which the atomic theory, at its best, would seem like a rattling of dry bones, and an idea of all-pervading law in the Greek intelligence from which the chance movements and combinations of the atoms were utterly remote.

I have said that atomism as a philosophy was a system of mechanical materialism; and it is clear that its founders shared less than any of their philosophical predecessors or contemporaries in the religious beliefs of the age. It is therefore worth recording that

Democritus, at any rate, inculcated an ideal of morality second to none for purity and disinterestedness among those put forward by the philosophers of Greece or any other country. "To do wrong," he tell us, "is more unhappy than to suffer wrong" "Magnanimity is shown by bearing offences against ourselves with gentleness." "Human happiness is not constituted by sensual pleasure, nor by money, but by righteousness and wisdom." "To repent of shameful conduct is the salvation of life." "Not the words, but the works, of virtue should be practised." "It is better to reproach one's self than others." "Goodness consists, not in doing no wrong, but in not desiring to do it."

*Anaxagoras and Diogenes of Apollonia.*

In deference to the order generally followed by historians of philosophy, we now pass to Anaxagoras, although in the order of time he precedes Democritus by a generation, having been born forty years earlier (500 B.C.). But we are told that his works were written after those of Empedocles, and so they may well have appeared later than those of the first Atomist, Leucippus, by whose speculations Anaxagoras was probably influenced. In fact, his philosophy reads like an attempt to mediate between the atomic theory and common opinion. While affirming the eternity of matter, the school of Abdêra had limited the unalterable qualities of its primary substances to extension, figure, and resistance. What we call the secondary qualities, as temperature, colour, and taste, had, in their opinion, only a subjective, or what they called a conventional, existence. But Anaxagoras drew no such distinction. In his view, all material qualities were equally real and equally eternal. And on the abstract *a priori* principle that nothing can come from nothing, his position is perfectly logical. If the eternity of matter is asserted

on the ground that we cannot conceive the smallest particle as beginning to be, we are bound to say the same of colours, sounds, odours, tastes, and feelings of touch. It is a mere evasion to call them subjective. When these sensations appeared in a world which had been without them before—a world of mere extended, moving, and resisting substances—the totality of existence was increased, something had come out of nothing, or, rather, something was where nothing of the kind had been before. To say that all the sensations of animals and of human beings have pre-existed eternally in the mind of God, even if it were a philosophically admissible theory, would not really solve the difficulty. For God's states of consciousness, however similar to those that have subsequently arisen, are not the same, but those of another being.

Anaxagoras conceived the present order of things as having been evolved from a primordial chaos, an infinite aggregate of infinitesimal particles in each of which all qualities were indistinguishably mingled. These particles were known to later writers as "homœomerics", but the term does not seem to have originated with the master himself. From chaos cosmos arose by what may be appropriately described, in modern language, as an evolutionary process of differentiation and integration. That is to say, like were segregated from unlike elements, and brought together in masses of increasing size. But the segregation is not perfect, nor do we gather that it ever will be perfected. No quality is exhibited by any substance with such purity as not to contain traces of every other quality.

The evolutionary process is not spontaneous—not due to what we call the unaided forces of nature. "All things were together"—and apparently had been so for an infinite time—"when *Nous* came and separated them." Then, as afterwards, *Nous* meant Reason, but whereas with Aristotle it means some-

thing that is both immaterial and inextended, with Anaxagoras it is immaterial only. He calls it "the thinnest of all things, and the purest; infinite, mixed with nothing, alone, itself by itself." In addition, "it has all knowledge about everything." There is a remarkable resemblance between this power and the Thought which Parmenides identifies with pure being—a resemblance still more obvious in the Greek, where the two words are etymologically connected (νοῦς and νόημα). And we may legitimately infer that the later is derived from the earlier conception.

That pure reason or thought should ever have been identified with pure space is, indeed, an idea so remote from our modern way of looking at things that we can hardly imagine how the Greek philosophers, with their extraordinary intelligence, could ever have accepted it. Regarded, however, as a survival of primitive animism, it becomes easier to understand. If Anaximander could regard the heavenly bodies as blessed gods; if Xenophanes could ascribe omnipotence and omniscience to the material world; if Empedocles could represent Love and Strife as elementary bodies co-extensive with the other four; if, further, we consider that the abstraction of reason or pure thought from life, sense, and imagination was probably just as difficult as the abstraction of space from matter or of numbers from objects, and went on *pari passu* with it, the two processes aiding and illustrating one another, then we shall see how the ultimate results of the two tended to coalesce, just as the primitive abstractions, body and soul, had tended to do at the start.

Space, in modern thought, passes for something so infinitely weak that we feel a fresh difficulty in following Anaxagoras when he describes the Reason which he seems to identify with the cosmic Space as having power to initiate and carry on the differentiating process by which the qualities of matter are segregated

from the original blend and evolved into an orderly world. But if we consider this re-arrangement as being effected by the interposition of portions of space between the different qualities and the union of molecules possessing the same quality in the same space, we shall to some extent unravel the confusion of ideas by which space, as a necessary condition of the segregating action, came to figure as the process itself or as its cause. For the rest, according to Aristotle, Anaxagoras only used the *Nous* as a *Deus ex machinâ* to explain what he could not account for by purely physical agencies—a method which occasionally finds imitators among modern men of science.

Besides occupying an important place in the history of speculation, Anaxagoras is a memorable figure, in the history of general culture, as the first philosopher who chose Athens as his abode, and, unhappily for the fame of that city, as the first also whose free inquiries brought him into collision with the religious superstitions of the age. St. Paul—or, rather, his picturesque biographer—was long afterwards impressed by the strong religious feeling of the Athenians; and in early times this feeling took the form of worshipping the personified powers and objects of nature. Among these the moon came in for a large share of their veneration; so much so, indeed, that old-fashioned believers somewhat resented an attempt made to regulate the calendar by the solar year rather than by her monthly revolutions. Nicias, the Athenian commander in Sicily, contributed to the destruction of his army by refusing to begin his retreat immediately after a total eclipse of the moon. His piety, as Thucydides grimly observes, did not save his life. Now, Anaxagoras had convinced himself, partly, as would seem, by the study of meteoric stones, that the heavenly bodies were not divine luminaries, but masses of earth and stone. In particular he interpreted the markings on the moon's surface as indica-

tions of plains and ravines. She did not shine by her own light, but, on the contrary, caused eclipses of the sun by the interposition of her cold, dark orb between him and us. It was probably feared that such impious speculations would draw down celestial vengeance on the city where they were propounded; but Anaxagoras lived safely under the powerful protection of Pericles so long as the authority of that enlightened statesman remained unshaken. But a time came when the foreign policy of the democratic leader excited such hostility that an attack on his friends might be safely attempted. Anaxagoras was prosecuted for impiety, but escaped the hemlock by a timely flight, as Socrates, had he chosen, might have escaped it a generation later. He retired to Lampsacus, a city where he enjoyed such respect that coins exhibiting the sage's head were struck in his honour.

The illustrious philosopher who first made *Nous* or Reason an efficient cause in the gradual evolution from chaos to cosmos may be considered as having himself initiated the theological reaction to which he nearly fell a victim. And his is not the only instance of the kind that will meet us in the course of this narrative. The candid friend is more disliked than the open enemy, and religious conservatism ever offers a more passionate resistance to the religious reformer than to the uncompromising destructive.

Another noteworthy point is that the modern association of democracy with advanced thought was unknown to antiquity. Wealthy and high-born citizens had no suspicion that their privileges were in any way safeguarded by the maintenance of popular superstition. On the contrary, it was the masses that looked on their own supremacy in the State as somehow guaranteed by adherence to the old forms of worship, more particularly with what we call the Cthonian religion—the mysterious cults

of those gods and goddesses who were supposed to be the guides and rulers of departed souls, Hermes and Dionysus, Deméter and her daughter Persephonê. Accordingly, when the busts of Hermes, placed as ornaments along one of the great thoroughfares at Athens, were found defaced and mutilated one morning, the people took it as a sign that the destruction of their democracy was contemplated by the band of midnight revellers who had perpetrated this sacrilege, and the panic became worse when it transpired that the mysteries of Deméter and Persephonê had been impiously parodied by the young nobles in the course of a private banquet. All this led to the removal of the gifted general Alcibiades from his command in Sicily—a measure not less fatal than the refusal of Nicias to retreat after a total eclipse of the moon

Whether as contributory to an intended oligarchic revolution or from motives of mere intellectual curiosity, the new physical philosophy was taken up with ardour by many high-born youths at Athens, whose attention it divided with horse-racing and cock-fighting. What they studied, however, was not the abstruse doctrine of Anaxagoras himself, but a popularised version prepared by the eclectic Dorian Diogenes of Apollonia in Crete (about 424 B.C.). The extant fragments of his book show a familiarity with the anatomy of the human body, making it highly probable that he was by profession a surgeon. In philosophy he went back to the Ionian Anaximenes, from whom he borrowed the doctrine that Air is the first principle, the common substance, whence all things are derived. But he identifies this material element with the *Nous* of Anaxagoras to the extent of describing it as the efficient cause of change, the intelligent and purposeful agency by which the world is not only constituted, but shaped and directed towards beneficent ends. Like Anaxagoras, again,

he conceives the cosmic evolution as a process of *differentiation* (in Greek *ἐτερολογεῖς*)—a term which he apparently was the first to use. With these speculations we come to the end of the period, a century and a half in duration, over which early Greek philosophy extends. Some historians have spoken of it as purely physical, and, in fact, its representatives are mainly occupied with problems of the objective world—with the question of how that world began, and how it came to be what it is. But the Greeks were an intensely human people, and at no time could the problems of mind and morals be very far from their thoughts. Thus we have had occasion to observe that some of the very earliest philosophers were deeply interested in practical life, as well as in nature; that they looked on the cosmic order as observing a law of justice, that for them there was a mental as well as a material side to the reality of things, if, indeed, those two aspects were not one and the same.

More than one of my readers must have been struck by the frequency with which the word evolution has occurred in the preceding pages. And this may seem strange in view of the fact that we so often hear evolution spoken of as the latest fruit of modern science. Does it not seem to contradict evolution's own law that so strange an inversion should obtain, that the same idea should come both first and last in the development of thought? The answer is above all that men take a perennial interest in the origins and causes of things, so that what needs explanation is not why that interest should have become so great with ourselves, but why it should ever have receded into the background. And the reason for this seems to be that there are times when theological belief dominates men's minds to such an extent that the story of creation given in its sacred books holds the field to the exclusion of every other theory on the

subject. This was proved even in Greece, where, as has been mentioned, no hierarchy ever held sway, by the popular acceptance of Hesiod's theogony as a satisfactory account of how the world came into existence; so that only when it fell into disrepute had the Ionian cosmogonies a chance to be considered, as similarly the modern theories of evolution had to wait for a hearing until the Hebrew traditions had been silently or openly given up. Then, in the second place, we have to take into account a remarkable but perfectly intelligible contrast between the respective developments of ancient and of modern thought. Among the Greeks intellectual curiosity began by claiming the whole field of experience as amenable to pure reason—that is to say, as explicable by natural rather than by supernatural causes. When the ground had thus been cleared, so to speak, by one great speculative sweep, the special sciences—mathematics, astronomy, physiology, and politics—gradually differentiated themselves in accordance with the law of Anaxagoras from the indefinite confused mass of unverified hypotheses, thus absorbing some of the best talent of the race, and driving back philosophy for its exclusive theme on the study of knowledge as such in contradistinction to the things that are known. In modern times, on the contrary, since the Renaissance the special sciences inherited from classic antiquity first won for themselves a relative independence and the permission to examine certain carefully restricted orders of phenomena, while leaving untouched the problem of existence as a whole. Only when the facts of astronomy, geology, and biology threw back inquiry from the laws of things as they now exist to the laws of the anterior and quite different state whence they have sprung did the old problems again press for examination, but this time with resources for their solution immeasurably beyond any that the early Ionians could

command. Finally, what we may call the political and geographical accidents by which the study of philosophy became concentrated at such a home of superstition and intolerance as Athens not only shut up the speculative liberty of its professors—so untrammelled at the circumference of the Hellenic world—within certain very narrow limits, but also reacted injuriously on the minds of the philosophers themselves, prejudicing them in favour of irrational compromises with tradition. The better side of the Athenian character also, the passionate interest in ethical and dialectical questions, born from habits of self-government and free debate, directly contributed to that development of moral philosophy and logic on which, as we have seen, the growth of the special physical sciences tended to throw back speculation.

This is the phase of Greek thought on whose examination we have now to enter

## CHAPTER IV

### PHILOSOPHY AT ATHENS · THE SOPHISTS AND SOCRATES

THE philosophical development that we have followed so far resulted, among its other conquests, in the creation of one idea the importance of which it is impossible to over-estimate, but of which, owing to its very greatness and consequent familiarity, we find a difficulty in imagining that any age or country was unaware. This is the idea of Nature. Our own word, although derived from the Greek through a Latin word of which the English is an almost exact reproduction, has not preserved its original meaning, which implied a gradual spontaneous growth, or what we should now call a process of evolution, rather than a fixed and uniform order of things. As such it seems to have been first applied by Anaximander to the endless series of perishing worlds, which who will may call gods, but in which there is nothing eternal save the justice that decrees their death. Before long, however, this new and pregnant term Nature came to be associated with those qualities of permanence in which the physical world stands contrasted with the human world rather than with the mutability which is their common lot. More particularly the variety of human customs was opposed to the uniform order of Nature, and this uniformity was explained by supposing that when things were left to themselves they obeyed a rule of justice too often violated by man. The idea of natural law had not then been reached ;

on the contrary, law was opposed to nature as the conventional to the permanent standard of conduct. And it was observed that certain vices, unknown to the unsophisticated animals, were widely practised among men; these, therefore, came to be stigmatised as crimes against nature.

But the antithesis did not end here, nor was it all to the disadvantage of man. Those works of art which we now regard as the peculiar glory of Greece cannot fail to have struck the Greeks themselves by their superiority to the works of nature, at least in the quality of beauty so admired by them, and the laborious training of the artist proved how much education added to inborn gifts. True, the great lyric poet Pindar loftily asserts the superiority of his own native genius to the artificial accomplishments of his competitors, while he justifies the triumph of brute force over right as nature's own law; but Pindar was an aristocrat by birth and association, so that his protest would be unavailing against the new enthusiasm for education, united as this was with the democratic movement in politics. For the masses in a Greek city-state were swayed above all by oratory, which is, more than poetry, an art that can be taught. To teach it, and, indeed, to teach all branches of the higher culture as then understood, became the profession of a class known as the Sophists.

The name Sophist in Greek had originally nothing to do with false reasoning, or, indeed, with reasoning at all. It meant simply a paid teacher; and whatever depreciatory sense it carried was connected not with the teaching, but with the payment. The Greeks thought that to make young men wiser and better by talking to them, if, indeed, it were possible at all, which some people doubted—ought to be a labour of love, and as such its own reward. Moreover, the high fees taken by the Sophists could only be paid by youths of fortune and family, who were not unreasonably

suspected of wishing to make themselves supreme in the State. Thus their object in spending large sums of money on the acquisition of rhetorical skill was really the overthrow of democratic government. This to an Athenian meant the total subversion of justice ; so among other nefarious secrets the Sophists must teach them that wrong was right, and how to make others believe the same, or, as it was popularly expressed, how to make the worse the better reason. A useful preliminary to this destruction of moral principle would be the inculcation of atheism as it was believed to be set forth in the writings of Anaxagoras and Diogenes. These and other philosophers were known to be peculiarly interested in what was going on towards the outer confines of the universe, impiously prying into the secrets of clouds, aerial currents, moon and stars—in short, all that had previously been looked on as the special province of the gods.

In one respect public opinion was not mistaken. Those Sophists about whom we possess exact information certainly rejected the current polytheism of their age, and thereby contributed to the great religious revolution that substituted the belief in one God for the belief in many. But so far were they from teaching immoral doctrines that their object was to put morality on a new and stronger foundation. The question at issue between them was what that foundation should be. And so far from being up in the clouds, half of them did not believe in nature at all. In fact, they were divided between two opposing currents of thought whose influence may be traced for many centuries in the subsequent history of Greek philosophy, and has extended far down into modern times. An account of the leading representatives on either side will set their views on the subject in a clearer light.

First in order of time comes Protagoras of Abdêra

(480-411 B.C.), a countryman of Democritus, but considerably his senior. This man, we are told, was the first to give instruction for money to young men under the form of what may be called finishing lessons in the art of life. He pursued this profession for forty years with signal success, traversing the whole Hellenic world, receiving large fees for his lessons, and being greeted with enthusiasm probably everywhere, but certainly by so exacting an audience as the intelligent classes at Athens, where he enjoyed the friendship of Pericles, the most enlightened statesman of his own or, perhaps, of any age. Athenian bigotry, however, became ultimately, though indirectly, the cause of his death. Protagoras, at what date we know not, had written a book in which the following sentence occurred: "About the gods I cannot say whether they exist or not. Life is too short for such difficult investigations." This modest confession of agnosticism brought down an action for blasphemy, to escape the consequences of which he took flight, and perished at sea on the way to Sicily, whether by disease or shipwreck is not certain. Those who possessed copies of his books had to give them up, that they might be publicly burnt in the marketplace of Athens.

Another recorded utterance of the first Sophist states that "man is the measure of all things, the standard determining whether they do or do not exist"; and this has been interpreted as a denial that there is any such thing as objective reality or absolute truth. To put the same idea a little differently, whatever each individual feels or thinks is true *for him*, whatever may be its value for other people. But the words quoted become more intelligible if we understand them in a practical sense, as a protest against making nature the standard of good and right. For we know from the evidence of Plato that in educational matters Protagoras was a Humanist—that is,

he discountenanced the method pursued by rival teachers of giving lessons in mathematics and astronomy to the youths in training for a political career. And, to judge by a speech which Plato puts into his mouth, he looked on public opinion as the great moralising agency that has raised the more advanced races of mankind from savagery to civilisation. And this, according to him, is so true that the greatest scoundrels in a civilised community stand far above savages both in the knowledge and practice of what is right. One need but recall the tendency of Rousseau, Diderot, and other naturalist philosophers of the eighteenth century in order to appreciate the Protagorean point of view. It would seem, also, that the great contemporary historian Thucydides had adopted a similar philosophy. For he describes the Greeks as having advanced to their present unique position from a state originally indistinguishable from that of the barbarians by whom they are surrounded; and he dwells with unusual emotion on the massacre of a number of Greek school-children by a savage host of Thracians as the most horrible event of the whole Peloponnesian war. It has been interpreted as a result of Sophistic teaching that certain speakers in this writer's history should proclaim the supremacy of brute force over justice in the most naked language. But what Thucydides really seems to mean is that natural law, so far from offering a safe foundation for morality, is in fact its negation; and that war, by throwing back the Greeks into a state of nature, was seriously threatening the high standard of justice previously developed among them by the peaceful action of public opinion—a lesson quite in accordance with the philosophy of Protagoras.

The celebrated Sicilian rhetorician Gorgias (427 B.C.) seems to have been of the same way of thinking. We find him carrying his hostility to the idea of Nature so far as to deny her existence altogether. By combining

the mutually contradictory positions maintained by the different schools of Greek philosophy, he arrived at three sufficiently startling conclusions. In a work bearing the suggestive title, *Concerning the Non-Existent of Nature*, he argued (1) that nothing is; (2) that if there were anything, it could not be known; (3) that if there were known to be anything, such knowledge could not be communicated. These paradoxes are but little more extravagant in theory than the assumptions of so-called Christian Science, and much less mischievous in practice. Probably Gorgias meant them for no more than a telling protest against Naturalism as a method of ethics. In fact, he seems to have denied that there is any universal rule of conduct, or such a thing as virtue in the abstract; on his view we should rather say that there are various virtues, each relative of the age, sex, and class of the individual on whom it is obligatory. For the rest, Humanism with him took the form of enthusiasm for the maintenance of Hellenic liberty and independence against barbarian conquest on the one hand and political tyranny on the other.

Yet Humanism, after all, with its perpetual appeals to Greek convention and Greek opinion, failed to give a complete view of what life should be; and the study of nature offered not only a wider basis, but even a loftier outlook for morality. In this sense Naturalism found two representatives among the great Sophists, Hippias and Prodicus, of whom the first proclaimed it openly as his principle, the second rather indirectly and by implication. Both belong to the latter half of the fifth century B.C. Hippias came from Elis, the neutralised territory within whose confines the Olympic Games were celebrated. It is thought that the encyclopædic range of his studies and the breadth of his moral theories were at least partially suggested by the varied accomplishments and the manifold types of Hellenic life, in the constant

experience of which he had grown up. He had the universality of Browning's Cleon or of Diderot, and self-sufficiency both in the good and the bad sense was the personal characteristic on which his satirists seized. It is possible, however, that Hippias merely anticipated Rousseau in advocating the return to a state of nature where every member of the community provided for his own wants, and that his theories were wilfully or unintentionally twisted into a story that he had once appeared at the games wearing a costume every article of which, even to the ring on his finger, had been made with his own hands.

Whether historical or not, such personal traits interest us only in reference to the memorable distinction first made by this Sophist between positive and natural law. Where there seemed to be a conflict between the two he declared himself on the side of nature. In a speech to a gathering of philosophers Plato makes Hippias say: "All of you who are present here I reckon to be kinsmen and friends and fellow-citizens, by nature and not by law, for by nature like is akin to like, whereas law is the tyrant of mankind, and often compels us to do many things which are against nature." And it would appear that he taught his pupils to ascertain the will of nature by the sedulous study of geometry, astronomy, and physics. His lessons may have inspired the great passage where Euripides in the wisest democratic spirit bids his audience honour equality, who "binds together both friends and cities and confederates," and from whom "our measures, weights, and numbers come"; reminding them, further, that "the night's blind eye and sun's bright orb walk equal courses in their yearly round"—neither of them being "embittered by defeat." Another virtue fostered by the study of science is truth, and not by science only, for, as Hippias took occasion to point out in a lecture on what we should call the Homeric ideals, Achilles

is to be preferred for his detestation of falsehood to the less scrupulous Odysseus. In æsthetics also this Sophist followed the same guidance, at least if we may judge by the fact that in a Platonic dialogue, when invited to define beauty, he refers for a typical example not—as might be expected from Greek taste—to a beautiful youth, but to a beautiful maiden.

A kindred spirit to Hippias was Prodicus, the last Sophist about whom we have any detailed information. Plato only introduces him as a valetudinarian trifler drawing fine distinctions between synonyms. But Aristophanes calls him for character and wisdom the first physical teacher of the day; and Xenophon makes Socrates quote one of his moral apologues with warm admiration. In the lesson referred to natural law is not named, but it is implied throughout as the standard of conduct in a spirit akin to that of the future Stoic philosophy. Virtue is not placed under the sanction of public opinion, but of individual interest understood in the highest sense, no pleasure being really satisfying unless it has been paid for by an equivalent amount of labour; while a special stigma is thrown on unnatural vice. Prodicus also rejected the gods of popular religion as supernatural personalities, explaining that they arose from the personification of natural elements and powers. That he gave lessons in philology as well as in physics is not doubtful, but, so far from constituting a course of delusive rhetorical display, they seem to have taught an even pedantically minute accuracy in the choice of words.

The Greeks have been accused of drawing an impassable line of distinction between themselves and the barbarians. But this is not true of Thucydides, who, as we saw, explains how Greek civilisation was evolved out of an originally barbarous condition, still less is it true of Isocrates, another pupil of the Sophists, who tells us that what makes the Hellene is not race,

but education. The Greeks are also said to have known only that some are free, whereas we know that all are free. But this, too, is an unjust charge, for it was the Sophist Alcidamas, a pupil of Gorgias, who first declared that "God sent all men to be free; Nature made none a slave." And this was no idle school declamation, it formed part of a stirring appeal to all Hellas in favour of the Messenian helots then struggling for their liberty against the Spartan power.

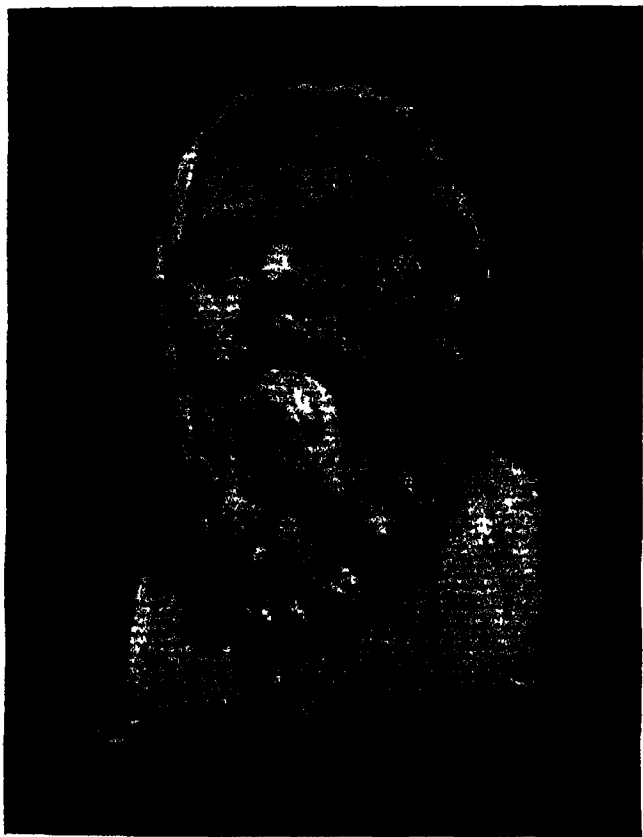
### *Socrates.*

Socrates (469-399 B.C.) is the first Athenian name that meets us in the history of philosophy, and, although he wrote nothing, the contributions of his disciples to Athenian literature, the greatest in the world, have made him by far the most celebrated figure in the annals of human thought. Shelley has called him the Jesus Christ of Greece, and, although the contrast between them is hardly less than between the Hebraic and the Hellenic spirit, still a certain resemblance may be traced in the seriousness of their teaching, the self-devotion of their lives, and the lofty tragedy of their deaths. It has not yet been suggested that Socrates never existed, but the problematic element in his personality is so large that no universally accepted conclusions on the subject have as yet been reached. Accordingly the view here offered should be taken as claiming no more authority than such as may attach itself to a careful and repeated scrutiny of the materials available for forming an opinion.

Perhaps we shall best understand the position and methods of Socrates by comparing him with the Sophists. To begin with, they took fees for their teaching, whereas he took none. Of so much we may be certain; for it is proved not only by the direct evidence of his disciples Xenophon and Plato, but also by the indirect evidence of Aristophanes, who, in his

brilliant comedy *The Clouds*, represents Socrates as a somewhat squalid figure, whose calling, whatever else it was, evidently could not be very lucrative. In the next place, he was an Athenian born and bred, who loved his native city, and never left it, except at the call of military service. The Sophists, on the other hand, were itinerant strangers, presumably looking on their business as a source of profit and fame rather than a patriotic duty. As strangers also they could advance claims to superior wisdom with less offence than a native, on whose part any such pretensions were always liable to excite the jealousy or suspicion of his fellow-citizens, any one of whom thought himself as good as his neighbour. Accordingly, it became a social necessity for Socrates, even if he felt conscious of superior wisdom, carefully to conceal it from others, giving them the notion that his original ideas were in truth the common property of all, or had even been suggested to him by the stimulating conversation of his interlocutors.

It will be remembered that the Sophists were professed teachers not only of wisdom, but also of virtue. A certain amount of respectability was therefore a necessity of their calling, nor is there any reason for doubting that they possessed it. But from the nature of the case such wandering lives as theirs could not be subjected to very keen scrutiny; and, at any rate, they were absolved from the ordinary duties of citizenship. As a resident Athenian, Socrates could claim no such immunity, nor could he even hint at the imperativeness of right conduct without offering in his own person a model of what he required. But in this direction also anything like ostentation, self-righteousness, or repellent austerity would have been a fatal mistake. Habitual self-command, combined with sociability and graciousness of demeanour, were the object-lessons least likely to wound the self-esteem of others; and these were illustrated to per-



SOCRATES

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fection in the personality of Socrates, extending, perhaps, his immediate influence as a moral reformer more widely than the supreme acts of civic and military heroism that have won him an immortal name among posterity.

Once more, philosophy, to become acceptable at Athens, had to appear in detachment from physical science and in alliance with religion. The new culture had incurred serious unpopularity, at the time of its first introduction, by association with such studies as those of Anaxagoras, of Hippias, and, as would seem at one period, of Prodicus. They had for a time a certain vogue among the aristocratic classes, but were profoundly repellent to the middle and lower class as both impious and unpractical. Socrates fully shared that aversion, he was a Humanist to the same extent as Protagoras, but, unlike the Abderite Sophist, his Humanism left room for the gods of popular religion. It seems strange that so thorough a rationalist should have been able to combine the traditional polytheism with such a speculative theism, based on the argument from design, as Xenophon attributes to his master. But the still more wonderful feats of dialectical gymnastics performed in our own time by Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians serve at least to show that no suspicion of insincerity need attach itself to the Modernist movement in Athens.

The idea that the order of nature owed its origin to a guiding and shaping intelligence came from Anaxagoras. But Socrates remained dissatisfied with the large place still left to mere mechanical forces by the Ionian philosopher. He sought for evidence of a rational purpose in the adaptation of the human body to its environment rather than in the uniform revolutions of the celestial spheres, and with the eye of a craftsman for utility—Socrates was by trade a sculptor—he found that everything had been arranged

for our convenience and enjoyment. Moreover, going a step beyond Anaxagoras, he conceived the beneficent Creator not as an extended substance, but as a purely spiritual being, like that which is the animating principle within ourselves.

At this point we touch the essential idea differentiating Socrates from both the great Sophistic schools, Humanist and Naturalist alike. His was, above all things, a philosophy of self-conscious mind, and in some ways it enabled him to combine what was true and good in the methods of his predecessors. Protagoras was right up to a certain point, but men are distinguished from animals by something more than their susceptibility to praise and blame. It is not enough to ask what modes of conduct public opinion approves or condemns; there must be an assignable reason for its judgments to be accepted. Man is the measure of all things, but only in so far as he submits his casual impressions to the test of logic; if one man's opinion is more valuable than another's, it is because by argument he can make his opinion yours. The return to nature preached by Hippias has this much to be said for it: that the practices universally prevalent among mankind are likely to be founded on common sense, but, if so, there must be a good reason for observing them; and then, surely, to discover that reason for ourselves is better than to accept them on the authority of others.

As is well known, the Socratic method of reasoning consisted in putting a series of well-chosen questions to his interlocutors, and so drawing them on from admission to admission, until a conclusion was reached whose approach had remained unsuspected through the greater part of the conversation. This sort of cross-examination was practised in the Athenian law-courts, just as in our own, and then, as now, may sometimes have served to bring a rotten case to the ground. It seems to have been in vogue as a

sort of society game before the time of Socrates; but he was the first to use it on a great scale as a philosophical method for discriminating between error and truth, as also in education for bringing home ascertained and demonstrated truth to the mind of the pupil. Plato, in some of his Dialogues, has given far too much weight to the negative side of the method, as if it had been his master's sole interest to unmask pretenders to knowledge and virtue, with the result of making himself the most unpopular character in Athens. He also associates this systematic exposure of shams with a peculiar theory, supposed to have been held by Socrates, that nobody knew anything about anything, except, to a certain extent, his own trade, and that only in a blind, empirical sort of way—a fact much to the glory of God, who was thus shown to have reserved all knowledge for himself. And if the Delphic oracle had declared Socrates to be the wisest of men, this was simply because he alone knew that he knew nothing; while all others remained in the false conceit of their wisdom—a delusion which it was the business of his life to dispel.

There is probably this much truth in Plato's story: that Socrates claimed to be a dialectician, and nothing else. Now, dialectic, as such, is primarily concerned, not with the material truth of propositions, but with their meaning and their logical implications. What one says must be intelligible, and it must be self-consistent. Whatever else may be true, what involves a self-contradiction is certainly false. Nor is this all. What follows by logical inference from a true statement shares its truth, and by drawing such inferences from what you say I may discover truths that neither of us had a suspicion of before. In this way the whole content of geometry follows from a few simple propositions known as the definitions, postulates, and axioms, and may be acquired

by the most ignorant without extending the range of his experience.

Socrates had learned something of geometry in his younger days, and what he saw of its methods may have suggested the more general idea of dialectic. He must have been more particularly impressed by the value of definitions, without which the geometer cannot advance a single step. But he had no suspicion of the great future reserved for this and the other branches of mathematics in unravelling the secrets of nature. To his utilitarian mind, with its passion for immediate practical results, these sciences were worth studying only as instruments for surveying land and for casting up accounts. And such plebeian arts could stand no comparison for importance with the true master-sciences, ethics and politics. Here, and here alone, could the methods of definition and just inference find a worthy subject for their exercise.

The task set himself by this man, whom many regarded as a garrulous and hair-splitting trifler, was nothing less than the reformation of society and of the State. But in his view this great purpose was to be effected, if at all, by means very different from those habitually employed by the prophets and preachers of ancient and modern times. He never indulged in moral declamation. Although a religious thinker, he never appealed to religious emotion, nor, indeed, to prejudice or passion of any description. He neither denounced nor dogmatised, but addressed himself solely to the reason of his hearers. And this was very much harder for him than for any of his successors, as he had to begin by making the world understand what reason means, in what the processes of definition, classification, and generalisation consist; doing it all without pedantry and without assumption, in language at once the most familiar and the most courteous, using the homeliest examples to elucidate the loftiest themes.

Aristophanes has told us that the Athenians were the cleverest of men in their own homes, but the silliest in their collective deliberations. Socrates wished this individual intelligence to be directed towards the acquisition of special aptitudes in all departments of the public service, and made available for the good of the whole State. The exercise of each particular trade and profession demanded special training and proficiency to secure success, why not, then, the supreme arts of war, finance, administration, and justice? Above all, why choose certain magistrates by lot, as was still the practice at Athens, rather than for the qualities that are considered to recommend an agent or an adviser in private life?

The method of reason was less obviously fitted to bring about a reformation of morality, whether public or private, than to secure the prosperity of the State. For while it is held reasonable to sacrifice a small immediate gain or a small immediate pleasure for a great gain or a great pleasure in the future, it is by no means equally clear why one individual should sacrifice his own good—whether conceived as pleasure or profit—for the greater good of another, or even for the good of the whole community. It has even been held unreasonable that he should do so. This, however, is a mistake. Reason, by its very constitution, abstracts from all differences, except such as would equally affect the decision of a third person in weighing your claims or mine against those of another person. In fact, egoism as a principle of conduct confuses psychology with logic. To say that a man's actions are determined by his selfish or passionate impulses does not legitimatise their origin. To say that they are rightly so determined would be self-contradictory, for it would be making the negation of all rules into a rule. Even from the selfish point of view it would be absurd. For to enounce a general proposition as true amounts to a claim on the agreement of all

mankind, so that for one man to proclaim the doctrine of self-interest as alone possible is to invite all other men to combine for his destruction by warning them that he will destroy them individually when it is his interest to do so and he can do it in safety.

In point of fact, all men are not invariably actuated by self-interest or passion, and even if they were, these two forces would frequently unite to set up laws for the protection of the community and to punish particular infractions of them. For, as Rousseau says, an injury to one is a threat to all; and, as Protagoras pointed out, the consciousness of a common interest in virtue sets up a public opinion whereby temperance, courage, justice, and generosity tend to be bred as moral habits, while their opposites tend to be weeded out. But the sanctions of morality do not end here. The conception, created by reason, of an all-embracing moral law so impresses the imagination, first of a chosen few, and then through these of an ever-increasing number, as to become what has been well called an *idée-force*—an idea tending to realise itself, so that conscience, by having the right, more and more, acquires the power to rule the world.

To grasp the moral problem in its whole magnitude and difficulty was a task reserved for Plato. But the conflict between goodness and expediency had already, to some extent, dawned on Socrates. In his own case, indeed, it did not exist, seeing that for him personally to know the right and to do it were the same thing. But, as a social reformer, the irrepressible conflict between private interest and public good could not escape his notice. As an intellectualist, he provisionally solved the question by observing that what caused most disputes were the lower gratifications of sense and appetite, the higher and more rational pleasures were best enjoyed in common,

thus making for co-operation and social union. There is some truth in the suggestion, but it begins by making too great a demand on average human nature. Calling on the sensual, the vain, and the weak to set their minds on higher things is no more practical than a well-known recipe for catching birds. Nor even as regards the *élite* of mankind does the sociality of their pursuits put them beyond the reach of anti-social temptations. To live well they must first have the means of living at all, and the possession of intellectual or artistic tastes does not always, nor did it even in ancient Athens, include the material means of satisfying them. Thus the temptation to procure money or other forms of power by fraud or generally by anti-social means remains unaffected by the elevation of the objects which those means are destined to obtain.

### *The Death of Socrates*

Among the pupils of Socrates two at least, Alcibiades and Critias, showed by their lives how little intellectual accomplishments are worth as safeguards against the temptations of pleasure and of power. The vindictive treason of Alcibiades proved the ruin of his country. Critias figured as the leader of the hateful oligarchy established after their victory by the Spartans, who, during a brief reign of terror, deluged the streets of Athens with blood. These men tried to involve the old philosopher in their crimes, but he disobeyed their orders and freely criticised their policy in his conversation. More than one of the Thirty may have been old friends of Socrates, at any rate, they refrained from adding his murder to their other misdeeds. That outrage was reserved for the restored democracy to commit. In their eyes, to have been the teacher of Alcibiades and Critias, combined with his known aristocratic

sympathies, was doubtless his chief offence. As the Socratic method had not reformed the young nobles, people argued that it had made them what they were. The charge of corrupting youth already brought against Socrates many years before in *The Clouds* of Aristophanes was aggravated, as in that comedy, by the more serious charge of atheism—that is, of denying the gods of the established religion and putting strange gods in their place. The pretext for this grotesque imputation was that Socrates professed to be favoured with mysterious warnings against certain courses of action which he described as intimations from a divine presence, always serving to check and never to prompt. This divine voice has been absurdly identified with what we call conscience. The idea of such a monitor is, indeed, derived from Greek philosophy, but it did not come up until a century after Socrates. Moreover, conscience is something that enjoins, as well as forbids, and the very name shows that it is connected with the reasoned knowledge of right and wrong rather than with an inexplicable prophetic warning against danger.

On these charges Socrates was tried and capitally condemned. According to the humane custom of Athens, his death was inflicted painlessly by a draught of hemlock. The defence put into his mouth by Plato is probably for the most part fictitious. From the more authentic information supplied by Xenophon we gather that he addressed the popular tribunal with fearless dignity, relying for his vindication on the well-known facts of his life and teaching. But the ignorant mob of jurors expected the usual though illegal appeal to their pity, and bitterly resented the pleas of truth, reason, and justice which the old philosopher made so bold as to urge on his behalf. They would, if they could, have sentenced philosophy itself to death.

The apology for persecution so fashionable in our day has been alleged in exculpation of the Athenian dicastery. They are said to have been actuated by political rather than by religious motives. To put an illustrious old man to death because his political sympathies do not go with extreme democracy would be a not less inexcusable crime than to put him to death because he has inaugurated a logical method that seems fraught with evil consequences for superstition. But the very fact that on this as on other occasions the party-leaders appealed to the religious prejudices of the mob in order to compass their political ends is enough. Taken together with the other recorded persecutions, it proves that underlying all party divisions there was in the Athenian populace a dense layer of intolerant fanaticism such as no other Greek city ever exhibited. And at Athens itself the death of Socrates throws a particularly lurid light on the collective stupidity of the masses. For in this instance it was a defender of religion that fell a victim to their religious zeal.

## CHAPTER V

### PLATO

THE poet Wordsworth has associated Plato with Demosthenes as the greatest intellect among the Greeks. Macaulay, with wider knowledge than Wordsworth, has called him the finest of human intellects absolutely. And Emerson has identified him with philosophy itself. Besides these modern testimonies it has been believed until lately that some beautiful lines written by Aristotle refer to the master under whom he studied for twenty years. The unnamed subject of his panegyric is described as one who alone or who first among mortals demonstrated, both by his life and by his reasonings, that for a man to be good is to be happy as well. Recent investigations go to prove that not Plato, but Socrates, is meant. But that the words should long have been accepted as true of Plato is eminently significant, for it amounts to an admission that the greatest name in philosophy should be primarily associated not with a metaphysical theory of ideas such as that commonly suggested by it, but with an ethical theory of life.

It is not denied that Plato held such a metaphysical theory, nor that some account of it is indispensable to a right understanding of his philosophy, only it must be placed in the proper perspective as subsidiary to the problem of conduct, to the primary questions, what is virtue? what is happiness? and what is the relation of each to the other? These, as we know, were leading topics in the discussions between Socrates

and his friends, and it has been seen that, whatever Aristotle may have said to the contrary, he left them practically unsolved. Plato found them in that condition—nay, pressing more urgently than ever for a solution if such tragedies as his master's martyr-death were not to be indefinitely repeated. Granting that the Athenians had sinned through ignorance, then their ignorance ought to be removed, or supposing the education of a whole people to be impossible, then power should be put in the hands of a more enlightened class. The choice would be partly determined by personal circumstances, of which some account must now be given.

Plato (427-347 B C) was of noble family, being descended on his father's side from Codrus, the last king of Athens, and connected through his mother with the legislator Solon. When the oligarchy of thirty was set up it seemed likely that he would be associated with them in power, for two of the leaders, Critias and Charmides, were his uncles, and, like him, pupils of Socrates. But it is credibly related that their behaviour towards the old sage, already mentioned in the preceding chapter, besides their other iniquities, cut off all hope of a moral reform from the aristocratic side, and the tragedy that ensued a few years later alienated him still more effectually from the restored democracy. With all prospect of a political career thus cut off, Plato proceeded to qualify himself for starting a radical revolution in the beliefs and practices of the Greeks, if not of all mankind, by an extensive course of travel and study. A visit to Egypt gave him the idea of a settled order lasting unchanged for literally ten thousand years, resting on religious beliefs upheld by a powerful hierarchy, and coexisting with such a popular education as made Greek ignorance seem swinish in comparison. He also visited Southern Italy and Sicily, making himself acquainted with the mathematical mysticism of the

Pythagorean school, the systems of Parmenides and Empedocles, and the more solid results of the new astronomy as studied in Western Hellas. In early youth he had already become familiarised with the teaching of Heracleitus. Returning to Athens, he opened a school of philosophy in a gymnasium dedicated to the mythical hero Académus, for admission to which some knowledge of geometry was an indispensable condition. This indicates a certain imitation of the Sophist Hippias, for whom Plato otherwise exhibits supreme contempt

About 367 he visited Syracuse for the second time, at the invitation of a philosophic friend, Dion, with some hope of converting its autocrat, the younger Dionysius, to a liberal philosophy. For a time his eloquence carried all before it, and geometry became a fashionable rage at Court. But a reaction followed, and, as on the occasion of his former visit to the elder Dionysius, Plato had some difficulty in escaping from the clutches of the tyrant. Ten years later an expedition, probably organised by the Academy, sailed under Dion's leadership to liberate Syracuse, with no better result than the substitution of an austere for a disolute despot. Finally the practical statesmanship of Timoleon achieved what philosophy had failed to do, but Plato did not live to see this event—the most glorious in later Greek history

Napoleon accused Laplace of applying the differential calculus to politics. Plato used the methods of elementary geometry for the same purpose, and, as we have seen, with no better success. But in philosophy the change effected was immense. We can best understand it by comparing his logic with the logic of Socrates. The old master knew something about mathematics also, and may have been led by it to appreciate the importance of definition in the study of ethics. But he obtained his definitions—such as they were—by induction; by eliciting

some common principle from a number of concrete instances. Plato eschewed this method; and his earlier Dialogues have for their object to show how it breaks down under the hands of an ideal Socrates. The result is at first pure scepticism—a melancholy conviction that truth is beyond the reach of man. But after a time light begins to break. In a Dialogue named after Protagoras, Plato, under the disguise of his master, demonstrates to the old Sophist that all the virtues have for their end to secure the greatest possible amount of pleasure with the least possible endurance of pain. And, be it observed, this pleasure is not that of all sensitive creatures, as in the theory now called Universalistic Hedonism, nor of all mankind, nor even of the community to which the moralist belongs. It is the individual pleasure of the virtuous agent himself, as in what we call Egoistic Hedonism, and what Carlyle called "pig-philosophy."

Plato subsequently came to repudiate this form of utilitarianism—how soon we cannot tell—while remaining a utilitarian in the wide sense of holding that actions should be judged by their consequences rather than by sentimental considerations. But in old age he returned to it so far as to insist that mankind would never be actuated by any motives other than pleasure and pain. This, however, at least according to Plato's later philosophy, does not prove pleasure to be the highest good, nor pain the worst evil; although the principle that man is the measure of all things would lead to that conclusion. In one of his later Dialogues, the *Philébus*, there is an elaborate discussion of the supreme good in which it is finally decided that measure and harmony take rank as such. Now, in the *Protagoras* it is observed that, as virtue is concerned with weighing quantities of pleasure and pain against one another, it must be an art of measurement. Such measurement would at first have no more than the value of a means to an

end, but experience teaches us that with most human beings, and therefore with philosophers also in so far as they are human, means are apt to substitute themselves for the ends they were originally thought of as subserving; and in this way measure would soon take the place of pleasure in Plato's mind, and the more so that he also came to look on both pleasure and pain as essentially indefinite, fluctuating things, not really amenable to the balance of reason at all.

Meanwhile, in reference to the evolution of Platonism—and with it of all philosophy—we have to observe how the concurrent study of ethics and mathematics tends towards the substitution of deduction for induction in moral science—a process still further strengthened by the discovery that morality means the measurement of pleasures and pains. In this way it seemed as if disputed questions of conduct would ultimately be decided by arithmetic. But Plato does not stop here. Like Kant, at a far later period, he asks himself how apriorism is possible; how, by mere reasoning apart from all experience, we come into possession of new truths. For example, the Platonic Socrates takes a youth totally ignorant of geometry, the slave of his friend Meno, and, by a series of skilfully put questions, leads him to the discovery of what we now call Euclid's forty-seventh proposition—the theorem that the square on the base of a right-angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares on its containing sides. The solution suggested is that the truths discovered by deductive reasoning were really learned in a prenatal state of existence, and that the function of argument is merely to revive a faded memory. But this is evidently meant for no more than a figurative way of saying that the soul is eternal, and is brought by mathematical reasoning into touch with eternal truth; with things as they are in themselves—the world of

immutable and perfect existences, recognised as such by reason at the suggestion of the dim and fleeting appearances apprehended by the senses, and constituting the material world.

This is Plato's ideal theory, and it illustrates once more the profoundly practical bent of his genius. For in his eyes the value of idealism is that it sets right conduct on an entirely new basis. The ultimate sanction of virtue is not public opinion, as Protagoras taught, for successful injustice may be applauded and envied by the multitude, nor yet, as Plato himself once supposed, is it pleasure, for justice and temperance may be accompanied by a surplus of pain, while the intensest pleasures and pains are experiences of the perishing body, not of the everlasting soul. That justice and temperance are never perfectly realised in human society is no argument against their real existence, as well—we can imagine Plato saying—might the truth of geometry be disputed because there are no perfectly straight lines, no perfectly round circles, and no perfectly equal angles, nor, indeed, perfect equals of any kind, in the visible world. Modern philosophy speaks of such perfection, whether mathematical or moral, as existing only in and for thought. That is a limitation Plato has expressly refused to admit, insisting on the necessity of an objective universe beyond matter and sense, or, as we should say, a spiritual world, in which they are fully realised, but this we must rather regard as a survival of the old materialism than as a consistent application of his own principles. The truly important point is his insistence on viewing the ideas as eternally self-realising entities, as types and models of what the sensible world not only ought to be, but yet may be.

Our philosopher has been called the father of all mysticism, and historically this is true, at least for Europe. Whether for Asia also cannot, I believe, as

yet be certainly determined. But in the sense ordinarily attached to mysticism it cannot justly be predicated of his teaching. For the mystic, as we now understand him, believes that existence is a unified whole, every part of which is reflected in every other part, and the nature of which may be perfectly comprehended without recourse to the methods of observation and reasoning by the reflection of any single mind on what passes within it. Without going to this extreme length, there is a modified mysticism that believes in the capacity of certain privileged intelligences to perceive truths before they can be reached by reason, or truths not accessible to reason, or even contradictory to it. Now, these are forms of mysticism with which Plato would have nothing to do. For him reason is the supreme faculty; not, indeed, the sole avenue to truth, but the test to which all truth must be submitted before it can be acknowledged as such.

A mystical element might with more plausibility be sought for in what is known as Platonic love. Among ourselves the phrase is supposed to stand for an attachment purer, more exalted, and more disinterested than the passion, however legitimate, ordinarily entertained for a person of the opposite sex. And, although this was not what Plato meant, it does not depart so widely from the truth as some interpreters have maintained. Plato teaches—whether rightly or wrongly we need not now inquire—that the philosophic impulse is, at its origin, akin to sexual love. Both are first kindled by the sight of bodily beauty, and both have for their object birth in beauty—that is, the increase and spread of beauty through the world. But whereas ordinary passion, from beginning to end, concerns itself only with sensible forms and particular individuals, philosophic love, which is the passion for truth, rises by successive stages of thought from appearance to reality, from

sense to spirit, from body to soul, from the individual to the class, from the one to the all. Had Plato been writing in Latin or in a Latinised language, he might have expressed the likeness and the difference between profane and sacred love by comparing generation with generalisation. And here there seems to be a touch of mysticism in so far as the resemblance between the two instincts is merely fanciful or accidental. But even so, Platonic love would seem to be a practical rather than a speculative idea. And the danger of mysticism lies, not in practice, but in theory; not in the stimulation of reason by fancy, but in offering fanciful analogies as evidences of unseen realities.

In one of his erotic Dialogues Plato represents those glimpses of ideal loveliness by which the soul is inflamed with the passion for absolute virtue and truth as reminiscences of her experience in a former state of existence. Whether he seriously believed in such a state is a question on which opinions are still divided, and likely long to remain so. With all the immense materials available, we cannot even tell whether Wordsworth's *Intimations of Immortality* is to be understood literally or not, nor, to take a still more recent instance, what Jowett really believed about a future life. It is much more important to know that Plato as a moral reformer wished the world in general to believe in a state of rewards and punishments after death. On his own ethical theory, to make people behave themselves by bribes and threats was not the true method of salvation. It left them no better than they were before. And this suggests something more than a suspicion that the whole scheme of a judgment after death as detailed in some of his Dialogues has a merely allegorical value. Perhaps the notion came to him from Egypt. We may say with more certainty that it passed from Platonism to the Catholic Church, in whose hands, however, faith became a determining factor in man's immortal

destinies to an extent irreconcilable with Greek ideas of justice.

A new morality and a new religion are not of themselves enough to reform mankind. They must become embodied and enforced in a new social order. To give the programme of such a society is the object of Plato's greatest and most ambitious, though not most perfect, work, the *Republic*. In this the design for an ideal State is worked out. Sparta and Egypt seem to have contributed in about equal proportions to the plan; but there are elements due solely to the philosopher's own constructive genius. Of this it is no disparagement to say that the most fundamental thought comes to him from Anaxagoras. That is the thought, since made more familiar, of differentiation and integration. It will be remembered that the great thinker who first brought philosophy to Athens conceived the universe as having come into being by the evolution of cosmos—that is, order—out of chaos under the impulse of nous or reason, and that reason acted by segregating particles of the same kind and bringing them together in uniform masses. Now Plato conceives that what answers to this principle in communities of men is the division of labour, and that civilisation has grown up through its continuous application. But he applies the principle in a somewhat unexpected manner. According to him, when consistently carried out, it necessitates the exclusion of the industrial classes from political power, and the committal of government to the sole charge of a superior class, bred on eugenic methods and educated from infancy for the office. From adolescence to middle life the new aristocracy is to be trained to the profession of arms; after thirty-five a smaller number, selected for the purpose, are to pass through a severe course of mathematics, logic, and metaphysics which alone can qualify them for the supreme direction of the

State. For, in Plato's opinion, there can be no salvation for the world until either kings become philosophers or philosophers kings. The ideal State will then exhibit in a visible embodiment, and so for the first time in a perfectly intelligible form, those virtues which the old inductive method had so utterly failed to define. Justice is popularly supposed to consist in giving each one his own, temperance, in taking enough and no more, courage, in willingness to face danger, pain, and death, wisdom, in knowing what is right and true. But such phrases were shown by the Socratic cross-examination to be either false or unmeaning. At best they tend to stereotype current opinions and sentiments at the expense of all future progress. For example, Plato could not admit any definition of justice and temperance implying the sacredness of property and marriage as at present organised. So, boldly identifying the good with the useful, he calls justice the assignment to each class of its proper function. The business of the industrial class is to provide the material means of living; the warriors are to guard us, the rulers to teach and direct. On the other hand, it would be the worst injustice if the masses were to interfere with the management of State affairs, or if the rulers were to use their power to fill their pockets. And it would be equally mischievous if the best men were to be prevented by what might now be called a system of unreasonable taboos from entering into fruitful alliances with the best women.

A Cambridge tutor once checked what he thought the irrelevant inquiries of an undergraduate by observing that their business was to translate Plato, not to understand his philosophy. Our business on the present occasion is to understand his philosophy, not to criticise it. Some unjust criticisms may, however, be obviated by putting the philosophy in a clearer light. It must be remembered that Plato's

vigorous denunciations of democracy are directed against the Athenian constitution—that is, against direct government by a mass vote of the whole assembled people, and especially against its worst institution, the huge, irresponsible, popular law-courts, where innocent persons were sometimes condemned to death as an excuse for confiscating their property. They do not apply—or at least not without very serious limitations—to the representative governments we now call democratic. In England and America training and specialisation illustrate the division of labour, and so far are more “just” in the Platonic sense than anything antiquity has to show.

As regards his departure from the traditional morality of marriage—which was about as strict at Athens as among ourselves—Plato no doubt had in his mind some customs prevailing in the proverbially virtuous society of Sparta. At any rate, sympathy with vagrant amours had no share in his proposals. On this subject the morality of his last work, the *Laws*, is of uncompromising severity. It sets up as an ideal absolute chastity before marriage, and after it absolute fidelity. And this is recommended expressly on the ground that “it would promote much greater affection and intimacy than now prevails between husbands and their wives.”

Rightly to appreciate Plato's views on marriage we must also remember that in the *Republic*, they are merely given as indications of what in his opinion was the wisest course to pursue. His principle is to constitute an efficient government, leaving at full freedom of action in working out the details. And in this government women are to have an equal share. Plato was no believer in the natural equality of the sexes. As regards intellect, he thought women “ridiculously” inferior to men; and, unlike Socrates, he held that the inferiority was not due to education, but innate. Nevertheless, he saw that many women

were superior to many men, and he looked on their ability as a wasted force that ought to be utilised for the service of the State, in the army as well as in the Government. There is no question here of rights, but only of duties. The wise and good of either sex would rather pursue their studies in private than undertake the toilsome business of office, if they submit to this, it is in self-defence, to escape being ill-governed by others. Plato is well aware that his own favourite law of the division of labour may here be quoted against him. Are not women naturally fitted for one set of functions—for domestic offices—and men for public functions—for war and politics? Not so, he replies, for were that the case there would be some things that women could do better than men, whereas there is nothing—not even cookery—that men cannot beat them in. The thought may have flashed across him in Egypt, where the division of labour was carried much farther than in Greece, with the result—surprising to more superficial thinkers—that “domestic” industries were sometimes allotted to men and outdoor industries to women. And, apart from political economy, he must have had an instinctive feeling that when the State undertook the work of match-making it would be wise for male administrators not only to consult, but also on occasion to obey, the most intelligent representatives of the class possessing hereditary aptitudes for the arts of match-making and breeding. About the military efficiency of women he is a little ironical, suggesting that they should be posted in the rear, where their numbers at least might have an imposing effect on the enemy.

The need of a reformed education gives Plato the opportunity for putting forward views on art strikingly analogous to those of the Jews, of Islam, and of the modern Puritans. Sculpture, painting, and the drama are altogether proscribed on the ground that

they substitute the appearances for the realities of things. In epic poetry, not only is everything approaching voluptuousness to be rigidly suppressed, but no trace of human weakness in such a heroic figure as Achilles is to be permitted to appear. Young people are not to read the unedifying stories about the gods related by Homer, and the rule extends to instances of deceit practised on mankind. Indeed, much of what is told about God in the Hebrew Scriptures would not pass the Platonic censorship. For in the State religion of the *Republic*, God is declared to be the author of good only, not of evil at all. In music, soft and melting strains are to be prohibited, as also is the whole pathetic element, which is not to be tolerated in poetry either. Children are, apparently, not to be allowed to know that there are such things as vice and crime; and they are to hear no stories in which the good appear as other than invariably and perfectly happy—except, possibly, they may be allowed to suffer some calamities as a retribution for sins committed in a previous state of existence.

Nor is this all. To secure the triumph of good over evil, perfect happiness for the good man in this life is not enough, he must also have the prospect of felicity in a life to come, while very much the reverse is in store for the bad. For the immortality of the soul, though not generally accepted, is, according to Plato, quite certain. He argues that if anything could destroy the soul it would perish by moral corruption—which, as we know by experience, does not happen. Therefore souls live for ever, migrating after apparent death into a new body, higher or lower than the last habitation, as their own choice, which God leaves free, may decide. But before resuming their earthly existence all souls have to pass through an intermediate stage of disembodied consciousness, lasting a thousand years, in which they receive tenfold retribu-

tion for the good or evil deeds performed in life, the worst offenders being subjected to everlasting torments

In connection with this earlier "Divine Comedy" two points merit particular notice. The first is that, as Plato avowedly uses fiction for the purpose of persuading people that happiness always accompanies virtue, although he must have known quite well that this is not true, no regard for truth in the abstract would have withheld him from imagining future or ante-natal lives in which he did not himself believe, or from defending such fictions by arguments which he knew to be unsound. The second point is that each soul, before returning to earth, is described as taking a draught of L  th  , whereby all remembrance of her experiences in the intermediate state is blotted out. May we not regard this detail as a pretty broad hint that the whole doctrine of the soul's eternity is not intended to be taken very seriously? Let me add that our modern Platonists have provided two ways out of the difficulty. According to some, there will be an ultimate stage in psychic evolution when the soul will recover the memory of all her former experiences, or, supposing this to be impossible, of so many as shall be necessary to re-establish the bond of personal identity between the present and the final stages of her existence. According to others, even supposing that the chasms of oblivion are never destined to be bridged, still the prospect of even so meagre a survival would be far preferable to the certainty of annihilation. The question is one that we must each decide for ourselves. But I may be permitted to add one word more. By all that one sees and hears, to the vast majority of believers the current Christian doctrine of immortality seems to be no more consoling than the theory of successive revivals, taken at its thinnest, could possibly be.

In the later books of the *Republic*, Plato develops his theory of Ideas in the direction of linking them together as a connected and interdependent system of categories covering the whole range of knowledge and existence. His object, evidently, was that they should be regarded as something analogous to the chain of geometrical demonstration, but far superior to geometry in completeness and certainty. For mathematical proof depends on assumptions, whereas in metaphysics there should be no assumptions—everything from the first start has to be proved, beginning with the necessity of existence itself. Philosophy must not shrink from putting the question, Why should there be anything at all? and, Why should the world be exactly what it is? Yet on these supreme heights of speculation the practical interest reasserts itself, for, according to Plato, the Idea of the Good far exceeds existence itself in dignity and power. In other words, there is a world that Virtue may have a theatre for her exercise and evolution, or, as he put it afterwards, from the religious point of view, God is good, and, being without envy, he wills that all things should be good like himself.

That is the high-water mark not only of Greek religion, but of all the religion that has ever been preached to men. We seem to catch an echo of Plato's words four centuries later, when St Paul speaks of himself and his fellow-believers as "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ." Unhappily, in the philosopher's case, this high religious idealism proved not incompatible with a spirit of the grossest intolerance exercised, at least in theory, on behalf of an antiquated superstition that possibly formed no part of his creed. In Plato's last and longest Dialogue, the *Laws*, it is ordained that even perfectly well-conducted persons who do not believe in the gods and refuse to be convinced by his arguments are to be imprisoned in a reformatory for five years at least.

Whether they are to be liberated with or without a recantation is not clear; but, at any rate, in case of their repeating the offence, they are to be put to death. And the same penalty is to be inflicted on those who believe that the gods can be propitiated by prayer and sacrifice, as also on those who practise private devotions. On this system every form of Christianity would have fallen under the same condemnation as atheism.

It is not so true that extremes meet as that they cross. Tacitus has found in Tiberius the exact likeness of a tyrant's soul, as Plato described it. Yet Tiberius, with all his cruelties, refused to punish offences against religion, on the ground—which might well have commended itself to a philosopher—that the gods can take care of themselves. And Sir Thomas More, after proclaiming unlimited religious liberty in his *Utopia*—where he also denies the central dogma of Catholicism—himself persecuted the Protestants with a ferocity of intolerance that, in comparison with its horrors, makes the legislation of Plato seem moderate and humane.

Some later developments of Platonism remain to be considered, but these will find a more appropriate place in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER VI

### ARISTOTLE

THE German critic Friedrich Schlegel has said that every man is born either a Platonist or an Aristotelian. What this writer had in view was, apparently, to contrast the idealist with the realist, the metaphysical with the scientific, the poetical with the prosaic or strictly logical types of character. Such class distinctions of mental temperament are, no doubt, numerous exemplified, but they do not fully correspond to the antithetical divisions respectively headed by the two greatest of Greek thinkers. To judge from some scanty remains of his verse compositions, Aristotle had no small poetic talent, and a few passages in his extant prose writings where he gives expression to his inmost feelings bear the marks of genuine inspiration, enabling us to imagine what was that golden flood of eloquence so admired by Cicero in the lost dialogues of the Stagirite. But while the enthusiasm of the master, bred up with the prospect of a great political career, was for action, for world-transforming dominion, the enthusiasm of the disciple, born in a small provincial town, and belonging to a family of physicians, was for knowledge, so that, better than Plato himself, he answered Plato's description of the philosopher as the spectator of all time and all existence—with this limitation, that, being devoid of the practical shaping impulse, he too readily believed that all existence through all time had been and would be no more than a repetition of the only

world that his experience allowed him to behold. And even of that small portion he knew only what direct observation, supplemented by the less enterprising science of his time, could reveal. From one end of his physical treatises to the other there is not the remotest anticipation of a future discovery, if he comes across any such anticipation in the works of his contemporaries or his predecessors, they are invariably rejected. He argues against the infinity of space, the atomic theory of matter, the incandescence of the sun and the stars, the stellar constitution of the Galaxy, the classification of comets with the heavenly bodies. He denies the axial rotation of the earth and of the moon, nor will he admit that the celestial spheres, supposing them to be in a state of rapid rotation, are in danger of being torn to pieces by centrifugal force, or that fire is forced up by mechanical pressure. According to his physiology, brain is not the organ of mind, but a cooling apparatus, breathing is not the cause of animal heat, nor do all animals breathe—more especially, fishes do not breathe with their gills, as Diogenes of Apollonia taught. The heavenly bodies and the different animal species (with the exception of those resulting from spontaneous generation) have neither been evolved nor created, they have existed, and will continue to exist, eternally without mutation, as we see them to-day.

In his theory of knowledge Aristotle was a realist. That is, he believed that things are what they appear; our minds are so constructed as to supply a true picture and plan of the external world. In this he differed widely from Plato, who held that the things of sense offer but an imperfect image or shadow of the eternal ideas which underlie their fleeting shows. Here we have a characteristic note of the distinction between the genius of practical reform and the genius of pure contemplation, as illustrated in modern times



ARISTOTLE.

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by Berkeley, Kant, Fichte, Mill, T. H. Green on the one side; Descartes, Hobbes, Schelling, Hegel on the other—between those who regard experience as a plastic material and those who regard it as an immutable substance. And this disposition to take things as they are—or rather as they seem—which differentiates Aristotle not only from Plato, but from all other Greek philosophers of the first rank, is responsible for much of his obdurate conservatism even in pure science. But not all his errors come from his adherence to sense and common opinion. In astronomy and physiology we find him blinded rather by another kind of idealism, by the passion for systematising at all costs. And that idealism, that passion, he had imbibed from the lessons of Plato. But for Socrates, Plato might have become a poet, a dramatist, or a statesman, but for Plato, Aristotle might have remained a mere naturalist or a mere scholar to the end of his days.

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) came to Athens in his eighteenth year, entering Plato's school, and remaining there until the master's death—that is, for twenty years. Subsequently he became tutor to Alexander, the future conqueror, and held that position for a period of uncertain length, possibly not more than two or three years. On Alexander's accession (336) Aristotle returned to Athens, where he opened an independent school in the Lyceum. There he taught until 323, when Alexander's death restored the anti-Macedonian party to power. Obligated by a charge of impiety to quit the bigoted city, "that it might not sin a second time against philosophy," he retired to Chalcis, where he died the following year. Thus a third of the Stagirite's life, and that the most susceptible period of all, was spent in the society of Plato. The master called him the intellect of the school, and his lodging the house of the reader. The second epithet was less complimentary than the first, for

Plato had no great faith in books. Anyhow, the intercourse of two such minds kept up so long must have been most fruitful, nor can we suppose that the influence exercised was all on one side. Plato's later writings show that his system underwent extensive modifications in the closing years of his life. In one of these, the *Parmenides*, there is a destructive criticism of the ideal theory, containing at least one of the arguments afterwards turned against it by Aristotle. As it happens, one of the interlocutors in that dialogue is actually named Aristotle, and although this may be a mere coincidence, since a contemporary of Socrates also bore that name, it would seem likely that under the guise of Parmenides the Eleate Plato is actually describing himself. If so, he was sixty-five when the dialogue was composed, which would give the year 362 B.C. for its date, Aristotle being then twenty-three, and therefore quite old enough to have his difficulties taken into serious consideration by the master.

It is said that on one occasion a large audience assembled to hear Plato deliver a lecture on the Good, but, finding that it told them nothing about the practical interests of life, they dropped off one by one, Aristotle alone remaining to the end. We know from a reference in his *Ethics*, that the younger philosopher remained unconvinced by what he heard. The method of assessing moral values by an appeal to the metaphysical absolute did not satisfy his clear analytical intellect. He may have submitted some considerations tending in that direction at the end of the lecture. What we know is that in Plato's later dialogues the Good silently disappears from the high place assigned to it in the *Republic* as the first principle of Knowing and Being. In the *Timæus* that rank is given to the Idea of Identity. This is represented as accompanied by and correlated with the Idea of Difference, to which, however, it remains superior. And from these two combined arises the Idea of

Existence, as if to show that, taken in themselves, they are unreal abstractions; while, again, all three—Identity, Difference, and Existence—unite to form Soul, a clear intimation that Plato had now come to regard his Ideas no longer as transcendent realities, but as purely subjective concepts, having their sole seat and function in mind. Thus it is quite in order that the Ideas should not be so much as mentioned in his last work, the *Laws*. And for this gradual movement towards a more scientific view of the world we may conjecture that the influence of Aristotle was largely responsible.

At the same time, another speculative current, tending in some ways to interfere with Aristotle's criticism, has to be taken into account. This was the numerical mysticism of the Pythagorean philosophy, with which Plato's various visits to western Hellas must have kept him in touch. There are indications, even in the last books of the *Republic*, and much more in the *Timæus*, that numerical mysticism entered largely into the teaching of the Academy. Especially it seems to have fascinated Plato's nephew Speusippus, who perhaps, for that reason, was left head of the school in preference to the incomparably abler Stagirate, with the result, as Aristotle himself tells us, that mathematics took the place of philosophy in its teaching. At the same time, the influence was not all on one side. When Plato first came in contact with the Pythagoreans, they seem to have retained no vestige of that belief in the soul's immortality, under the form of metempsychosis, which formed such an important element in the teaching of Pythagoras himself. Now Plato had no need to go to Italy in search of the soul, for we know from Xenophon that it was an idea of prime importance in the philosophy of Socrates, unaccompanied, however, by any hope of its survival after death, or alleged memory of its existence before birth. That larger conception may

have come to Plato from the Egyptian religion, but, at any rate, in talking to the Pythagoreans, he could recommend it on the authority of their first master. Unfortunately, the Pythagorean school disappears from history soon after Plato's time, so that we know not what immediate effect, if any, his teaching produced, but it certainly was revived as what is called neo-Pythagoreanism some two centuries later, and became one of the most effective agencies by which the doctrine of immortality was diffused through the Roman Empire in association with a severe moral code, thus serving as one of the channels by which Platonism led into Christianity.

As regards the more scientific side of philosophy, Pythagoreanism seems to have influenced Plato by directing his attention more and more towards astronomy—towards the study of the sun, moon, and stars as affording a genuine knowledge, not of appearances, but of things in themselves. The *Phædo* approaches, but has not yet reached, this point of view, it speaks of the real heavenly bodies as others than those that we see. But in the *Republic*, the *Timæus*, and the *Laws* no such distinction obtains. False notions about astronomy are admitted to be widely current, but only a little reflection is needed to correct them. Plato had, indeed, no inkling of the heliocentric theory, and the arithmetical relations assumed by him as existing between the planetary orbits are purely fanciful, but it was the conviction, probably derived from him, that there must be some rational order in the solar system which led Kepler to the discovery of his Laws.

It is on the side of astronomy that the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies come into the closest contact—a fact that has hitherto escaped notice, because in both that side has least attracted the attention of modern inquirers. Plato's tendency is more and more to substitute the celestial luminaries for his eternal

Ideas as the prototypes of earthly order, the subject of our profoundest and exactest speculation. Aristotle, when he thought for himself, utterly discarded the Ideas, and his arguments may have led the master to discard them also, although the fact is never mentioned, but he certainly follows the lead of Plato in putting the stars and planets in their place, only doing this with greater clearness and decision. With him also the heavenly bodies are composed of no earthly materials, as Anaxagoras had taught, but of pure æther, and they are animated by immortal spirits. In this connection also we find him not only adopting the notion of Platonic love, but giving it a cosmic extension undreamed of by its original author. But to understand what necessitated this evolution of thought we must return once more from the resemblances to the characteristic differences between our two thinkers.

Plato, as we have seen, was a practical, reforming, innovating genius, Aristotle a more scientific, theoretical, conservative intellect. And each conceived a god in his own image. Plato imagined a creator of the world purely good, and wishing to make all things good like himself. Not that he thought of the universe as having really had a beginning in time, or of its eternal spirit as a personal being, but it satisfied his artistic and ethical instincts to give his metaphysics an allegorical dress, which should serve as an encouragement to the virtuous and a terror to the wicked. He may have privately cautioned Aristotle not to take the story too seriously, but, anyhow, there was little danger of a misconception. To the great naturalist the world was eternal because it was real and true. But to be complete it must include an absolute spirit, a pure disembodied Reason, performing the proper function of reason, which is to know. We might expect that this Supreme Being, if he did not act, might at least grasp the whole universe in one

all-embracing thought. But this Aristotle will not allow. His Absolute is not like that of the Hindoo sage —

The eye with which the universe  
Beholds itself and knows itself divine

To be pure, thought must think itself, and nothing but itself. And this, strangely enough, he conceives as the happiest, the only happy, existence. So, wrapped in eternal self-contemplation, beyond the outermost heaven, which is the sphere of the fixed stars, lives the one God, the Prime Mover, himself unmoved.

And here comes in a fresh line of contact between the two philosophies, formerly conceived as so antithetical, and that, too, where one would least expect it, in the form of a wonderful extension given by Aristotle to the notion of Platonic love. It is, he tells us, the love inspired by the supreme Reason, the self-thinking Thought, in the animating souls of the stellar and planetary spheres that is the cause of their eternal and uniform revolutions, such being the nearest likeness attainable for them to the absolute self-reflection of God. In that sense alone is the idea of a Prime Mover, himself unmoved, to be understood. The divine essence moves all things, not as loving, but as beloved. And so, although this principle is not creative, it may be truly described as that on which the heavens and all nature hang. For without those diurnal and annual revolutions, caused by the sun's movement, on which day and night, the seasons, and with them the whole activity of the whole vegetable and animal world depend, life would come to a stop. And this also, with its recurrent cycles of birth and death, reproduces, after a fashion, in time that eternal return on itself which is still more perfectly exemplified in space by the celestial spheres, and most perfectly of all by the self-contemplation of the supreme Reason.

We have here in concrete realisation that idea of identity or sameness which in the final form of Platonism was substituted for the idea of the Good. But the advance is, in the strictest sense, superficial. For Plato, by putting his absolute outside existence, at least suggested that it was only an abstraction, whereas Aristotle, by his pseudo-scientific apotheosis of reason, left it as a burdensome encumbrance on astronomy, which proved a serious obstacle to progress nearly two thousand years after his time.

Aristotle, however, has another and a much less mystical way of accounting for the circular movement of the celestial spheres. In order to understand this we must begin by grasping the distinction, fundamental to his system, between the two very unequal portions into which the universe is divided. There is first the sublunary sphere, including our earth with its atmosphere, and extending to the moon, or rather to the crystalline sphere on which our satellite is fixed, and by which she is carried round the centre of the world. Within this region are contained the four ancient elements—earth, water, air, and fire. The nature of earth is to move downward in a straight line to the centre, the nature of fire is to move upward, also in a straight line, to the circumference. Water and air partake of both natures, water being more akin to earth and air to fire, so on the whole the one rather tends up and the other down. Each element is composite, and therefore corruptible. Aristotle has the singular notion that the constituents into which they break up are not the invisible atoms assumed by Democritus, but sensible qualities of which there are also four, forming two antithetical couples, cold and heat, moisture and dryness. These hypostasised abstractions were evidently suggested by Plato's ideas, but are protected against criticism by the convenient assumption that they exist only in binary combinations. Of such combinations only four are

possible, resulting in the four elements, which are thus accounted for *a priori*. Earth is composed of cold and dry, water of cold and wet, air of hot and wet, fire of hot and dry. The elements are convertible into one another by a substitution of qualities, thus earth can become air by losing dry and taking on wet, and so with the rest. Hence the notion, still preserved in common language, that the sublunary sphere is a scene of change and death.

Above the lunar sphere and filling all space from that to the fixed stars inclusive is the æther or fifth element, whence our word "quintessence" is derived. Being simple, and therefore incorruptible, it is immune from all change except translation through space. And seeing that the rectilinear up and down movements have been already appropriated by the four sublunary elements, we must suppose that its proper motion is circular and eternal. Experience comes in to verify this *a priori* deduction, for, seeing that the heavenly bodies are ever moving, while at the same time they preserve a constant order and relative distance from the centre of the earth, what can we suppose but that they are carried on invisible everlasting spheres moving for ever in perfect circles? And Aristotle also finds a welcome popular support for his physical theory in the ancient religious tradition which has always taught that there is something divine and deathless about the heavens.

Nevertheless, had Plato's scheme of a religious inquisition been put in practice one of its first victims would have been his own most illustrious disciple. For Aristotle's theology is totally inconsistent with a providential government of the world. Knowing nothing but himself, the supreme Reason must remain unconscious of all that passes beneath his throne; if he knew it, no mundane consideration would be allowed to interfere with his blissful self-contemplation, if he knew what was happening on earth, and

wished to make justice prevail, the crystalline spheres would interpose an impenetrable barrier to the execution of his will.

Aristotle's astronomy and theology correspond to Plato's ideal theory, being, indeed, little more than a higher development of the latest Platonic phase. But his most important debt to the master is the general impulse towards systematisation, the postulate that nature and human life should be studied as an orderly connected whole, passing by successive gradations from the more to the less general, or *vice-versa*, without omitting any of the intermediate links. In obedience to this order we return from the celestial spheres to the sublunary region of opposition and mutability. This corresponds to the world of outward sense and unreality in Plato's philosophy, where it was conceived as a product, and to some extent a copy, of the underlying ideas. To Aristotle, on the contrary, earthly things are quite real, though not quite regular, chance and spontaneity being permitted a certain play in their movements. His treatises on the subject fall into two great divisions, one dealing with the natural sciences, the other with such humanist studies as psychology, logic, ethics, politics, and aesthetics. These latter are treated in each instance according to the systematic scheme of a division into two spheres—a lower sphere of opposition and conflict, a higher sphere of subordination and harmony.

As an anatomist and a naturalist the Stagirite is at his best, as a physiologist at his worst. "He notices the antagonism between individuation and reproduction; the connection of increased size with increased vitality, the connection of greater mobility and of greater intelligence with increased complexity of structure; the physiological division of labour in the higher animals; the formation of heterogeneous organs out of homogeneous tissues, the tendency

towards greater centralisation in the higher organisms—a remark connected with his two great anatomical discoveries, the central position of the heart in the vascular system, and the possession of a backbone by all red-blooded animals, the resemblance of animal intelligence to a rudimentary human intelligence, especially as manifested in children, and finally he attempts to trace a series of continuous gradations connecting the inorganic with the organic world, plants with animals, and the lower animals with man.”<sup>1</sup>

These important generalisations have since found their interpretation in the theory of evolution. And it has been suggested by some historians that Aristotle anticipated that theory, or at least made some approaches to it. But this is not true, and to say it shows a radical misconception of his philosophy. For in the first place he held that all the animal species always had existed, and always would exist, as we know them now. And in the second place he was a strong teleologist, believing that the animal organs had been designed and made for the functions that they now perform. Teleology, or the doctrine of final causes, is indeed one of the most important notes in Aristotle's philosophy, and agrees well with his habit of taking the more obvious or popular view of things. In this instance he also followed Socrates and Plato, but with an important difference. Socrates quite unequivocally argued to the existence of a good and wise Creator from the adaptation of the bodily organs to various useful purposes; and Plato apparently drew the same conclusion, although we cannot be sure that it formed part of his esoteric philosophy. Aristotle, on the contrary, could find no place in his system for a Creator; and accordingly his doctrine of final causes hangs, so to speak, in the air. The

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from my *Greek Philosophers*, Vol I, p 328, where the references will be found

utilities of the animal organism are spoken of as the work of Nature, but Nature in this connection amounts to no more than a personified idea, and as such is open to all the objections brought by Aristotle himself against the metaphysics of Plato. But if by Nature is merely meant the general fact that the structures of living beings are definitely related to their functions without our being able to tell how the adaptation came about, then to call the one the other's cause is to pass off a description for an explanation, which, according to Auguste Comte, is the essence of the metaphysical method

Modern science, when it admits final causes, strictly limits their operation to the organic world, leaving inorganic nature to the undisputed sway of mechanical causation. Curiously enough, this sort of compromise was anticipated by certain Greek philosophers, otherwise unknown, who admitted that the heavenly bodies arose, as they expressed it, "spontaneously"—as, for instance, out of a vortical movement—while claiming organic structures as the work of creative reason. But Aristotle will not hear of this, arguing that the perfect regularity of the celestial movements proves them to be guided by a much more rational will than the comparatively irregular actions of plants and animals

The fact must not be overlooked that it has been made comparatively easy for us to criticise Aristotle's scientific errors by means of the admirable scientific nomenclature and systematisation with which his philosophy supplies us. The very distinction between mechanical and final causation just referred to is an instance in point. Another useful pair of categories created by him is Form and Matter. He speaks of these also as causes, making four in all, but the notion of causation has in modern philosophy been limited with advantage to productive antecedence in time, leaving form and matter to express the structural

relations of a thing. It is a sign of surviving Platonic influence in Aristotle that he groups the Form with the Efficient and the Final Cause on the one side against Matter on the other as the true *raison d'être* of a thing's existence. For it had been the Idea, in Plato's sense, that made a thing what it was, expressing at once the meaning and the purpose of its existence.

Taking the first three causes together, Aristotle calls them Actuality, and the last or material cause Possibility. This famous antithesis is the central thought of the whole Aristotelian system, and should be carefully borne in mind if we would understand the great revolution accomplished at the time of the Renaissance, when Power took the place of Act as the speculative ideal. For the present we have to view it in association with that false astronomy to which we find ourselves returning again and again. The enclosing celestial spheres represent the combination of Cause and Form in the most illuminating way as moving in perfect circles, and as bringing to pass by their movement whatever happens here below. But they are also typical actualities as pure, incorruptible existences, never having been and never to be other than what they are now. Yet even from these blessed ones Possibility is not entirely banished. For at any moment of its revolution each luminary unites the actuality of its present position with the potentiality of the positions it will successively occupy in the course of its orbital revolution. Only from the unmoved, self-thinking Thought placed at the outermost verge of the universe does this last trace of imperfection disappear, leaving nothing but pure actuality behind. Beyond that there is nothing, not even a void, for to Aristotle, as to Parmenides, the infinite space of the Atomists and of Melissus is a chimerical delusion.

At the other end of his world-scale Aristotle puts pure Potentiality or simple Matter, the last and lowest

kind of existence—if, indeed, it can be said to exist at all. This must not be confounded with the extended, resisting, movable substance we call by the same name, for that has qualities, whereas Aristotle's Matter has none, unless the capacity to become any of the four elements can be described as such. Plato's philosophy had also included a primary material out of which all things in the sensible world are made; but by this he seems to have meant the pure space of geometry, which has at least the quality of extension, of which his disciple's prime Matter is devoid. The latter is, indeed, a hypostasised abstraction, more Platonic even than the comparatively concrete reality which it supersedes.

Michelangelo has said that the greatest sculptor can conceive nothing that a single block of marble does not contain in itself; and we may suppose that his grand phrase was suggested by the Peripatetic antithesis between matter and form. But, taken alone, it would fail adequately to illustrate Aristotle's theory of the relation between Potency and Act. In Nature matter and form are not related to each other as they are in art. Blocks of marble do not develop into statues by any inherent virtuality of their own, they may equally serve as material for a bridge or for a house, the shape, whatever it is, being artificially superinduced on the material from without. But earth, water, and air combine of themselves to form plants under the impulse of the appropriate seeds; vegetable substances are similarly converted into animal tissues, these into organs, and so forth. Thus there is an ascending series of potencies, each of which on its actualisation becomes the raw material whence the next actuality develops, until we arrive at human reason and the combination of rational beings in the State, beyond which there is in the sublunary sphere no further ascent.

It has been already explained how the four elements

come into being. Oscillating between the opposite extremes of hot and cold, dry and wet, the First Matter, formless itself, assumes the forms of earth, water, air, and fire. This oscillatory movement is characteristic of the lower stages of existence, and the first condition of a higher development is that it should be moderated or brought to a balance. Such is the principle by which Aristotle systematises his physiology, and it is in obedience to the exigencies of systematisation—itself a postulate derived from Platonism—that his physiology departs so widely from the truth. In other words, he interprets the internal organs of the body as chiefly a machinery designed to balance the extremes of heat and cold, with the consequence that he rejects the just aperçus of his predecessors. The lungs draw in air not to keep up the animal heat, but to moderate it, therefore the gills of fishes are not respiratory organs, there being no occasion for air to cool the blood where water supplies the need. The brain is a damp sponge used by nature for the same purpose, not what Plato divined it to be—the organ of mind. Women, being inferior animals, have colder blood than men—an unlucky shot, for in reality their temperature is somewhat higher. For the same reason, in procreation the formal element, being of higher dignity, is contributed by the father, and only the material element by the mother.

We now approach the great series of works to which Aristotle's fame is chiefly due at the present day, and on which it will more and more depend in the future. Of these it is difficult to speak in terms of adequate praise without some seeming injustice to the yet greater name of Plato, whose theories, indeed, they continually criticise. Yet without Plato's instruction and example his disciple's immortal treatises on Psychology, Ethics, Politics, Poetics, Rhetoric, and Logic would not have been written, or, at least,

not written with that mastery of method which has made them starting-points for the lines of investigation to be pursued by all subsequent inquirers. The poet Gray has said that studying Aristotle's works was like reading a table of contents; and, in fact, those just enumerated may be taken as a programme of the subjects to be dealt with by philosophy ever after, even down to the principal subdivisions of every branch. Here there is no space for anything beyond the most general indications, but it will be interesting to combine these with a running reference to the systematising idea by which Aristotle connects the subjective side of his philosophy with his theory of the universe as a whole.

Beginning with psychology, our philosopher regards the soul as the form of the body, using form in that peculiar sense which has already been explained as the realised end for which the animal body exists, and at the same time the efficient cause of its voluntary movements. He is a spiritualist to the extent of refusing to identify this animating principle with any kind of elementary matter, such as air or fire, or even, like the more modern Pythagoreans, with a harmony of the material elements of which the living organism is composed. But neither has he risen to the conception of spirit as an inextended something. It seems to be thought of as associated with a particle of the quintessential æther, drawn down somehow from the celestial spheres. Yet as "form" and final cause of the body the soul is too closely linked with the individual life of the body, whether animal or human, to antedate its birth or to survive its dissolution. Accordingly there is no metempsychosis, no immortality, no prospect of future retribution, no knowledge derived from antenatal visions of reality. Hence there is a higher place given to the senses as channels of information than Plato would admit—at least, in his earlier stages—and a more careful analysis

of the intellectual processes by which thought is evolved from sensation.

Perception results from the reaction on external impressions of the organs of sense, which are thus raised from a potential to an energetic condition, the "form" alone without the "matter" of the thing perceived being communicated—a theory still preserved in the word "information" And, following the law of all inferior activities, sensation, to be adequate, must be a mean between two extremes. Thus for distinct seeing the light must be neither too faint nor too intense, for distinct hearing the sound must be neither too soft nor too loud. The heart is the common centre of all the five senses, and, moreover, the seat of that "common sense" by which what we call the primary qualities of matter are perceived. The heart is also the seat of memory and imagination, faculties occupying an intermediate position between outward sense and reason. In this connection Aristotle explains recollection by the association of ideas—a process which Plato seems to have been the first to observe.

Reason, the power by which we form abstract ideas or concepts, is the highest faculty in the soul, and that by which man is distinguished from all other animals. But reason, considered as a power or faculty, does not exhaust the meaning given by Aristotle to *Nous*. It applies also to the concepts themselves, both as thoughts in the mind and as objective realities in the external world. For to him, just as much as to Plato, thought constitutes the truth of things, only the ideas, or, as he prefers to call them, the forms, do not exist behind, but in, appearances, as their final causes, their purposes and actualities. Thus the reason in ourselves, being akin to the reason outside, realises the thought embodied in things, crystallising it out, so to speak, from the sense-solution, and at the same instant, passing itself

from power to act, becoming identified with the individual concept that it frames. "There is nothing in the intellect that was not previously in sense"; but that is because intellect has informed sense from the beginning. Thus in man, as in God, Nous or Reason is a self-thinking thought, the difference being that what with us only takes place occasionally, and must end at last in death, goes on for ever with him. In this connection the denial of human immortality is clear and peremptory.

The organisation of reason for purposes of demonstration and argument is exhibited in Aristotle's logical treatises, which collectively constitute his greatest and most influential philosophical achievement. Among them his editors give the first place to a short tract on the Categories. It is of doubtful authenticity, but fairly sums up the Stagirite's views on a topic of less importance in his philosophy than in ours. Aristotle (or his editor) is not here, as has been absurdly supposed, enumerating the highest classes under which things can be ranged, but only the different assertions that can be made about the same thing. And these he obtains by collecting and analysing the common forms of interrogation in the Greek language. They differ but little from those in use among ourselves. To discover all about a thing, we ask: What is it? What sort? How much is there of it, or how large is it? What is it for? Where? When? What does it do? What is happening to it? And, if it is a live thing, what are its habits and dispositions? The answers to these questions yield the ten categories: Substance, Quality, Quantity, Relation, Place, Time, Action, Passion, Habit, and Disposition. The first six proved of immense importance long afterwards to Kant in framing his *Critique of Pure Reason*; but Aristotle was not much interested in any but the first—Substance or Being.

It will by this time have been made sufficiently clear that for our philosopher the *what* of things, their being or substance, meant their forms, variously understood as their natural species, their vital purpose, their moral end, or the cosmic circle to which they belonged. In the human reason forms are represented by concepts. Conception chiefly interests the modern logician as the first step towards framing the judgments by which two concepts are united in a single proposition, and the simplest form of reasoning is the syllogism, by which two propositions are so combined as to demonstrate a third, which is called the conclusion. This is done by showing that a less general is included in a more general assertion, and this again in one still more general, which, therefore, must also cover the least general of the three. This, however, was not the method of the Greeks—at least, not when they created logic. Aristotle, and Plato before him, understood the nature of propositions; but, not being so possessed as we are with the idea of Laws of Nature, they regarded judgments as mere mental processes rather than as the correlatives of objective fact expressing the relations between things in themselves. Accordingly, Aristotle treats the syllogism, not as a contrivance for bringing a less general under a more general truth, but as the interposition of a connecting link, called the Middle Term, between two forms, not before thought of as thus mutually related. In fact, it was a process illustrating the methodical efforts of his own physics and astronomy to construct the universe on scales of ascending or descending generality, of increasing or diminishing determination.

In the highest and simplest type of reasoning, well exemplified by the demonstrations of elementary geometry, the syllogism consists of two propositions, in one of which the middle term is subject, and predicate in the other. This is known in logic as the

first figure, and it answers perfectly to Aristotle's favourite scheme of a series of concentric spheres. But there are other equally convincing syllogisms in which the middle term, instead of being symmetrically related to the other two as containing and contained, is either the predicate or the subject of both propositions. This, however, does not suit Aristotle's concentric arrangement, so it has to be foisted on them by the highly artificial method of Conversion, whereby subject and predicate are made to change places in one or other of the two propositions involved, thus restoring the middle term to the place which, according to his system, it ought to fill.

Properly speaking, the first mood of the first syllogistic figure alone supplies a perfect type of demonstration, for it alone yields a universal and positive conclusion in the form of All A is B. The other three are either negative or partial, or both, as: No A is B; some A is B, some A is not B. And the second and third figures, where conversion comes into play, yield none but negative or partial conclusions. But all alike afford conclusions of demonstrated certainty, and are therefore comparable to the undeviating movements of the celestial spheres. It is otherwise with probable inferences, which may or may not be right. These find their parallel in the more or less irregular and highly complicated movements of the four elements in the sublunary sphere. Aristotle has devoted a long treatise, called *The Topics*, to an enumeration and analysis of the various methods employed by dialecticians in arguing for or against such more or less probable contentions, and it is here that his wonderful knowledge and sagacity are most effectively displayed. Hypothetical and Disjunctive Reasoning, for which no place was found in his syllogistic logic, are touched on here; and, what is more remarkable, the experimental methods of modern science

are anticipated, although their application to the discovery of Nature's secrets is not foreseen. Last comes a discussion of logical fallacies—both those into which men unconsciously lapse through weakness of the reasoning faculty, and those which are wilfully committed from interested motives.

Reason in speculation is opposed by all the forces making for error and illusion. Reason in practical life is opposed by the forces of passion and greed. Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* treats oratory almost exclusively as the art of using words for the purpose of stimulating irrational emotion. It contains much admirable analysis of the passions, and equally admirable characterisations of the different social classes in which it is desired to excite them. But of appeals to moral enthusiasm, or of language as an instrument of appeal to any feeling, good or bad, there is nothing; nor is there evidence that the writer had learned anything from having listened to the greatest orator the world has ever seen. The few and doubtful references to Demosthenes are on points of merely verbal interest.

The clearest exposition of Aristotle's theory of life is contained in his *Ethics*. The end of all action, we learn, is happiness. So far this agrees with the modern utilitarian view. But Aristotle would not accept the utilitarian definition of happiness as pleasure and the absence of pain. At least that is not what constitutes a happy life, although this may incidentally be accompanied by pleasure. The highest good for man is the perfect realisation of his humanity, and in that the most essential element is reason. Perfect happiness would be the unhindered exercise of reason; that is, perpetual theorising. But that is possible for God alone. Man is not only a reasonable but also a social animal—"more social than any bee or ant." And as the groundwork of his nature he has a complex equipment of desires and

passions needing very careful regulation. Here we have once more the microcosm with its usual parallelism to the universe. Theoretic virtue corresponds to the celestial region, moral virtue to the sublunary sphere.

In the *Rhetoric* it was shown how the concupiscent and angry passions could be stimulated to excess. In the *Ethics*, on the contrary, it is shown—or attempted to be shown—how they may best be moderated with a view to the formation of character. Here Aristotle puts himself in avowed opposition to the paradox of Socrates and Plato that virtue is knowledge, in the sense that to see what is right and to do it are one and the same. This, of course, applies only to the lower sphere, for in the supreme happiness of philosophical speculation theory and practice coincide. But theorising is a thing of which one cannot have too much, so there is no need for Sophrosynê, or the virtue of moderation, in its exercise, whereas there is every need of self-control where the lower impulses are concerned. For reducing these to a just mean Aristotle prescribes not moral teaching, but the formation of moral habits. We become just and temperate not by listening to sermons in praise of justice and temperance, but by continually practising forbearance and mutual respect. This seems thoroughly sound and sensible, indeed, it is what might be expected from one who belonged to a family of medical practitioners whose patients, no doubt, often disobeyed prescriptions which they knew to be right. Yet the case is not so strong against the intellectualists as he thinks. After all, an ethical theorist has to theorise, not to train. And before aiming at the golden mean we must know what the mean is, where lie the confines between excess and defect. Now Aristotle too hastily assumes that everybody knows that much. Everybody may be assumed to know the conventional standards; but

to observe these blindly would imply utter moral stagnation—or more probably moral degeneration. Plato was a reformer, and he wanted to recast the current ideas of conduct to an extent undreamed of by his disciple. What is more, he saw that to carry out such a reform the existing religion, education, and social institutions must be revolutionised—a work not to be accomplished by moderate chastity, but by right insight.

“The great multiplication of virtues in human nature,” says Bacon, “resteth on societies well ordained and disciplined.” Aristotle was far too great a thinker not to be conscious of this connection; and he also comes forward as a reformer in his *Politics*. This is perhaps the most valuable of all his extant works, at any rate, for us at the present day it is by far the most interesting. But here also it is as a systematic naturalist that the Stagirite excels. Like Plato, he too tries to plan an ideal State, but the uncongenial task is left unfinished, nor has the world lost anything thereby, for the fragment left to us is a feeble and colourless imitation of the *Republic*. Here also the best State is conceived as a true aristocracy or government of the best; the ruling body being divided into two sections, one composed of older and the other of younger citizens, respectively occupied with the guidance and with the defence of the commonwealth. The whole industrial life of society is abandoned to an inferior and contemptible body, destitute of political rights, by whose servile or unpaid labour the ruling caste is supported in the leisurely existence needed for its exclusive devotion to liberal pursuits. Between the aristocratic and the industrial classes no such affectionate relation is contemplated as that which in Plato’s scheme will bind together the “foster-parents” and the “guardians” of the State. In fact, the relation between the two is

modelled here also on the relation between the celestial and the sublunary spheres.

In his analysis and classification of existing constitutions Aristotle sees everywhere the conflict and temporary adjustment of opposite interests, with a permanent equilibrium of their contending claims as the solution next best to the construction of his ideal aristocracy. These imperfect constitutions are found in States whose inhabitants are solely or chiefly actuated by the desire for wealth, generally divided between a rich minority and a poor majority. Power is held either by the few or the many. In the one alternative it is called an oligarchy, in the other a democracy. Monarchy is in both constitutions a limiting case according to whether the sole ruler holds power in the interests of the few or of the many. Things being what they are, the best arrangement is to put power in the hands of the possessors of moderate means, or, where these do not exist in sufficient force, to preserve harmony by a judicious division of public functions between the rich and the poor. But why people who are assumed to be under the dominion of immoderate desires should consent to moderate them at Aristotle's bidding is not explained.

It has been shown how Aristotle's psychology, logic, rhetoric, ethics, and politics can be elucidated by reference to the systematising principle on which his whole philosophy revolves. But as regards his æsthetics the case is altered. For of the *Poetics*, which contains his theory of art, it would be less true to say that this treatise should be interpreted as a part of his whole philosophy than that it contains the key to his system, or rather that it is the system itself. Regarding the universe *a priori* as a work of art, his theory of art shows what the Stagirite expects the universe to be. According to Aristotle, the highest form of art is tragedy, and the soul of a

tragedy is its plot. Now a plot to be good must have unity of action; it must be a perfect, unbroken whole. Therefore the universe must be such another work of art, constructed on a single principle; "not," as he says himself in the *Metaphysics*, "improbable and incoherent like a bad tragedy." Further, the end of art is to instruct, and therefore it must be an imitation of reality, but not what we call realistic; that is to say, the truths presented must not be concrete and historical, but ideal; therefore the universe must be an ideal construction, clothed in sensible appearances—which is just what we have seen that on Aristotle's view it is. But the universe is more than a well-constructed whole. As the tragic drama possesses the scientific interest of adding to our knowledge as a perfect imitation of reality, so the heavens also possess that interest, only in them drama and spectator are one, for their animating spirits are self-conscious, and are moreover moved round by intellectual love, by aspiration after that self-thinking thought which is realised in God alone. Nor is the drama without this self-consciousness, for those speeches are the most effective in which the actors give an account of their intentions and motives. And as plot is the soul of tragedy, so the soul of that soul is recognition—that is, the discovery that a supposed stranger, sometimes about to be killed by one of the actors, is really his or her near relation. Have we not here a parallel to the philosophical recognition of a reason in the universe most intimately related to the reason in man?

It used to be held, and perhaps is still held by some, that according to Aristotle tragedy served to purify the emotions by pity and fear. The great German critic Lessing first showed that pity and fear are themselves the emotions purified, and this is effected by their own action. In the Aristotelian psychology they are opposed to one another, and

therefore must have a mean point to which they more or less approach, each acting and reacting on the other until selfishness and sentimentality are neutralised and reconciled in pure æsthetic sensibility. Or we may suppose that an excess of pity or fear is relieved by the perception of poetic justice allotting to the sufferers no more than the fate they deserve. Aristotle had satisfied himself that Socrates was right in making happiness a necessary accompaniment of virtue, and he seems to have extracted the same edifying lesson from Greek tragedy. The dramatic reconciliation of opposites would also agree well with his doctrine of an exchange of properties between the material elements and their harmonious combination in the living body. His general philosophy may have reacted to a certain extent on his æsthetic theory, but on the whole it was more natural for a Greek to regard the universe as a work of art on the grandest scale than to interpret the tragic drama as a miniature world.

G. H. Lewes has said that for twenty centuries Aristotle held the world a slave. No epigram could well be wider of the mark. For nearly six centuries after his death the Peripatetic school was the least influential in the Greek world, and its few eminent followers were men who thought for themselves. Cicero, the most cultivated Roman student of philosophy, seems to have admired the Stagirite chiefly as an eloquent declaimer. In the third Christian century a man of genius, Plotinus, for the first time drew largely on his ideas, but combined them freely with others borrowed from Plato and the Stoics. After him the Platonic element dominated more and more, becoming supreme in the earlier Middle Ages. Aristotle's real reign only begins in the thirteenth century, but does not last above two hundred years, when the Florentine Academy once more brings Plato into vogue. After that the new astronomy deals a

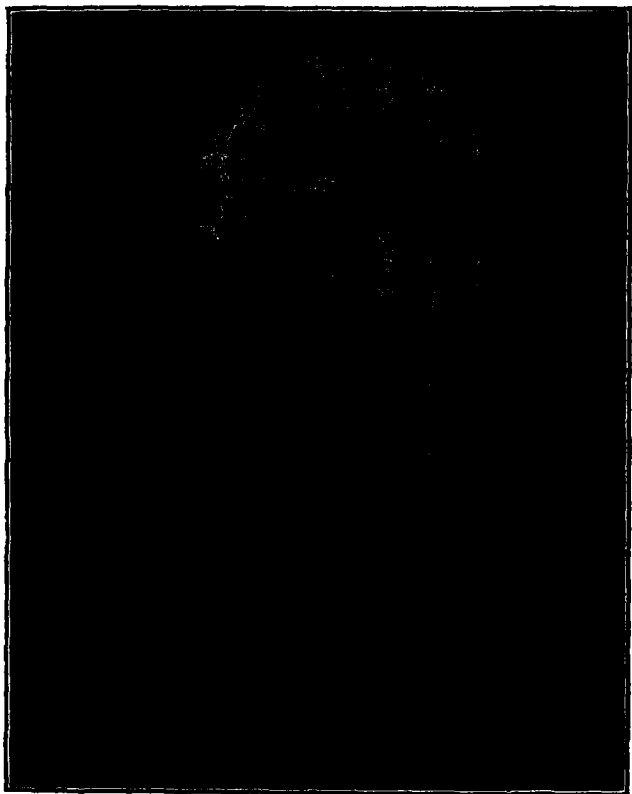
death-blow to all the ancient philosophies alike, considered as dogmatic systems. But Aristotle, as I have said, supplied the vast orderly and comprehensive framework of thought within which the education of the world was henceforth to proceed.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE STOICS, EPICUREANS, AND SCEPTICS

THE history of the physical sciences can be related as a forward march of the human mind from discovery to discovery and from idea to idea. But the history of philosophy follows no such rectilinear path, nor has it even the simplicity of an ever-widening spiral. Still less, however, can it be described as a barren debate on a certain number of frivolous or insoluble questions. Philosophy is, indeed, a debate, but a debate of ever-increasing complexity, covering a growing number of topics with new comparisons, conflicts, combinations, adjustments, extensions, and interpretations of the conceptions and interests involved. To carry on such a process the highest powers of intellect are needed, nor, as the history of philosophy demonstrates, does even the highest intellect suffice for the adequate performance of this task. Character, no less than intellect, is rightfully deemed a necessary qualification for dealing with questions relating, like the problems of philosophy, to conduct as well as to belief, for suspicion inevitably attaches to those who do not practise what they teach. And if philosophy demands a sort of moral genius to begin with, the life-long study of philosophy continually reacts on that genius, raising it to such eminence that some at least of the world's great sages have come to be numbered among its great saints.

Such selecting and elevating power is peculiarly



ZENO

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conspicuous in the post-Aristotelian schools, and above all in the greatest and most famous of them, which was the Stoic school. The founder, Zeno (about 336-264 B.C.), a native of Cyprus, appears to have been, at least in part, of Phœnician—that is to say, of Semitic—race; and some have attributed the moral rigour of his character and teaching to this strain in his blood. But the Semites as a race have always been more celebrated for their business aptitudes than for their austere virtue, and there is nothing in either the life or the philosophy of Zeno or any other Stoic of the same descent—there were several of them—to which a parallel cannot be found among the purest Hellenes. We are told that, on arriving at Athens, the first teacher to whom he attached himself was Crates, himself a disciple of the celebrated Cynic Diogenes. Now the founder of the Cynic school was Antisthenes, a disciple of Socrates, who also received instruction from Hippias and Prodicus, the two Sophists who first introduced the idea of Nature into Greek thought. That idea in its origin was wholly Hellenic, but it contained a germ of universalism destined to expand until it embraced the whole human race, giving the franchise of world-citizenship to all its members. The naturalism of the great Sophists seems to have been speculative rather than practical; under the influence of Socrates Antisthenes turned it into deadly earnest. In their endeavours after the simple life, he and Diogenes incurred much ridicule and obloquy; but their steadfast protest against the conventions of civilisation set up a tradition which has found great representatives down to the present day.

Zeno took from the Cynics what was to be the central precept of his system—Follow Nature!—but he associated it with a wider and more liberal culture, laying various philosophies under contribution for whatever ideas seemed to him useful and true.

Jealous contemporaries saw in this eclecticism the spirit of a Phœnician trader; but he had nothing of the half-hearted opportunism which assumes that whatever is widely believed must contain a large element of truth. To begin with, he met the spiritualism of Plato and Aristotle with a flat contradiction. All things, he said, consist of one substance, and that is body. This, at first sight, looks like a return to the materialism of early Greek thought; and, in fact, Zeno revived the physics of Heracleitus, adopting from him the theory that the fundamental element is fire. And this was associated more definitely than in the dark utterances of the great Ephesian with the doctrine that at periodical intervals the existing order of things perishes in a universal conflagration, followed by the production of a new heaven and a new earth. The still more precise doctrine, revived without acknowledgment by Nietzsche in our own times, that each successive period is an exact reproduction of the preceding one was borrowed by Zeno from the Pythagoreans. Such a theory, of course, excludes the very possibility of Free Will; and the Stoics were, in fact, strict determinists, or rather fatalists, departing in this respect also from the philosophy of Aristotle, if not from that of Plato.

It is hard to frame a clear and consistent account of the Stoic religion. It certainly differed from the theism of Aristotle, not only by making God material, but also by thinking of him as diffused through the whole world and animating it in every part. But the Stoics from Zeno on agreed with Aristotle—as also with Socrates and Plato before him—in their thoroughgoing teleology. That is to say, they believed that the world was a work of perfect skill guided by perfect beneficence, being so constructed as to secure the greatest good of mankind. It was reserved for the German philosopher Leibnitz, writing twenty centuries later, to formulate optimism in the expres-

sion that ours is the best of all possible worlds. But his thought is identical with theirs; it belongs to Athens, the great city of artistic design; and the master who first developed it under the painted Porch (poecilê Stoa), whence his school was named, may well have pointed to the pictures under that famous colonnade as illustrations of his argument that, if it needed a conscious intelligence to account for the beautiful things of art, so none but a supreme artist could have created the supreme beauty of the world.

The paradox is that while Socrates distinguished God as an invisible intelligence from the visible world, the philosophy of the Porch persistently identified them, and that, while Plato and Aristotle stood for the immateriality of reason, Stoicism refused to admit the existence of anything but matter or body. It may be thought that the difference was merely one of words. But this is not so. A corporeal God must consist of parts external to one another, and so related as to work together for a single purpose. In short, he must have to some extent the properties of a machine. But on the teleological view the machine implies a machinist, so that the solution of our problem, which was to explain organic purposes, is only pushed a step further off, each step involving another, and so on *ad infinitum*. It may be urged, as, in fact, it was by Shelley, that spiritualism is open to the same objection. For an immaterial creative intelligence must still be adapted for its work, and so far must exhibit what is called evidence of design. But Greek thought had not yet reached the conception, familiar to us, of mind as a mechanism, or organism—whichever term be preferred—and so mind could be conceived more readily than body as having existed from all eternity. Indeed, the logical consequences of the organic idea as applied to mind have not been generally admitted even now.

Where conception fails, says Goethe's Mephistopheles, a word presents itself at the nick of time. What came to the rescue of Stoicism was a very great word—or at least one destined to a great future—the Word or Logos of Heracleitus. Whether the Ephesian philosopher really meant by that term a supreme cosmic reason or merely his own teaching is still a disputed question; but that the Stoics in borrowing it from him understood by the Logos a principle of rationality permeating all nature is certain. With all their monism, their pantheistic identification of God with the world, they felt themselves forced into a partial dualism. All was God; but the All fell into two categories distinguished as active and passive, the creative intelligence and the plastic material on which it works. Thoroughly Stoic in this sense are the opening words of the Fourth Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word (Logos), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . All things were made by him. . . . In him was life, and the life was the light of men." The words attributed to St. Paul by the author of Acts, "In him (God) we live and move and have our being," are also Stoic. They are, in fact, quoted from the Stoic poet Aratus, a pupil of Zeno's and a native of Soli, the near neighbour of Tarsus, Paul's home, itself the seat of a Stoic school.

Owing perhaps to Plato's influence, the Stoics admitted a survival of the human soul after death; but this would only continue until the end of the world-period to which it belonged. Then, like everything else, it would be absorbed in the divine substance preparatory to a new creation. It has been already mentioned that each new period was to be an exact repetition of those that went before, thus offering in some sort an equivalent for eternal life. And that there should be this exact repetition followed logically from the assumption that the world is abso-

lutely perfect. For when perfection has been once achieved nothing remains but to go on repeating it for ever.

Herbert Spencer defined optimism as the belief that the amount of pleasure in the world exceeds the amount of pain. A deeper acquaintance with the history of opinion would have shown him that a false assumption was involved in his definition. For many philosophers have been optimists who did not identify the good with the pleasant. On this point the Stoics were perfectly explicit, as their moral teachers, the Cynics, had been before them. Their optimism consisted in believing that the world is as good as it can be made; but they also held that pleasure is not in itself a good—at least not for reasonable beings—nor pain an evil. Of course this doctrine enormously facilitated the task of proving that all things are for the best, still not a few difficulties remained, for, according to their ethical theory, virtue is the only good, while their vigorous onslaughts on vice amounted to a practical admission that there is an enormous mass of evil existing, for which their theology made God responsible. Plato escaped the difficulty, at least provisionally, by ascribing evil to an independent principle, seemingly identified with matter; nor could it trouble Aristotle, whose philosophy excluded creation altogether. But the Stoics, with their Asiatic absolutism, could admit no such division of powers, in their creed, as in the coming Catholicism, God is the sole author of all things. There is, however, this difference, that Stoicism absolutely excludes miracles; all events are linked together by an unbroken chain of causation reaching back to the first moment of creation. Nor is the divine will really free, being determined by an inflexible logic that fixes everything beforehand down to the minutest particulars in the successive cycles of existence. Therefore the course of nature

cannot be changed by prayer, nor is it desirable that it should be changed. Nor can God interfere, *proprio motu*, to save a just man from his fate.

What the Stoic apologists had to explain was why it is reasonable or right that in the best possible world the just man should perish and the unjust succeed. Like the optimists of all ages, they answered by transferring the emphasis from the word "best" to the word "possible." The world is as good as it can be; but owing to certain logical necessities lying beyond our comprehension evil exists as a by-product, or even as a condition of good. Indeed, by the law of relativity, the very notion of good would remain unintelligible were it not opposed to evil as light is to shade or warmth to cold. Without wrong there would be no theatre for the exercise of right. Here, as already in Aristotle, but with more emphasis on the moral side, the Greek tragic drama is the model on which Greek metaphysics are constructed.

We are often assured that morality is impossible without a belief in free will. The Stoics furnish a striking proof to the contrary, being not only determinists, but fatalists in the strictest sense. The necessity of human actions has also been held by some moderns to prove that punishment is unjust, for we do not punish involuntary offenders. The idea is not new. We are told that a slave of Zeno's, when caught stealing, pleaded that he was predestined to commit the theft. "And I," retorted the philosopher, with more wit than humanity, "was predestined to flog you for it." The real justification of punishment is, of course, its utility. We do not punish unintentional or accidental injuries, because to do so would not deter or amend. From the determinist point of view, to inflict eternal punishments after death is the extreme of wickedness; but Stoicism, as Epictetus reminds us, had no hell.

Still, without being so thoroughly bad as the God

of Mohammed or of Calvin, the Stoic Logos is open to very serious criticism. Man, the crowning work of creation, the highest manifestation of divine Reason, is the one blot on an otherwise perfect world. He is not merely an imperfect and fallible, but a thoroughly vicious creature. For in this uncompromising system not to be perfect is to be lost. An early Christian writer spoke in the very spirit of Stoicism when he said, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, is become guilty of all." To make matters worse, Zeno and his successors gave no very clear leading as to what virtue meant. They told men to follow Nature, or, more specifically, the rational nature of human beings. Yet nothing could be less natural or human or rational than their attempt to extirpate the impulsive and emotional elements of mind, their identification of virtue with insight. We may explain it by a reaction against the Aristotelian doctrine of moral virtue as a mean between extremes—a return to the intellectualism of Socrates and Plato. But their ideal of impassivity remains none the less false in itself, and irreconcilable with their religious optimism.

This ideal is supposed to be realised in the Stoic description of a perfect sage. For the history of religion this character is extremely interesting. When we find him described as at once prophet, priest, and king, perfectly good himself and an infallible judge of others, with the moral right to quit the world when it seems to him most fitting, it is impossible not to recall that later incarnation of the Logos, the divine figure of the Fourth Gospel, exhibited also to his followers as an unattainable example of perfection. What is more, in the mediæval *Imitation of Christ*, as if by reversion to an earlier type, there are traits akin rather to the Stoic than to the Evangelical model.

It was not pretended that a single teacher or disciple of the Stoic Porch ever realised in his own person

that ideal sage. The few who approached his excellence lived before the school began. And, on the principle that a mule is as good as a mule, even these were fools. Thus "the Stoic's pride" is a delusion of the ill-informed. Swagger and affectation were not encouraged at Athens, least of all among her philosophers. If moral idealism taught nothing else, it taught the virtue of humility. But, in fact, it proved both a school of character and a ferment of social change. Through tones that seemed harsh and grating there came "the still, sad music of humanity, with ample power to chasten and subdue." In this respect Stoicism only bore its full fruit under the Roman Empire, but the famous Hymn of Cleanthes offers good evidence of the religious fervour it could already evoke in the third century B C.

Cleanthes (300-220 B C), a Greek of the Troad, and therefore presumably no Phœnician, succeeded Zeno as head of the Stoic school. He had come to Athens in a state of almost complete destitution, but earned enough to afford him leisure for the study of philosophy by drawing water for the market gardeners of the vicinity. We have no reason to doubt the story; but, true or not, it supplies good evidence that the intellectual working man was a character not unknown to ancient Greece. I quote his Hymn to Zeus, from the closely literal but spirited version of Francis Newman, with the change of a few words.—

Almighty alway! many-named! most glorious of the  
deathless!

Jove, primal spring of Nature, who with Law directest all  
things!

Hail! for to bow salute to thee to every man is holy

For we from Thee an offspring are, to whom alone of mortals  
That live and move along the earth the Mimic Voice is  
granted

Therefore to Thee I hymns will sing, and always chant thy  
greatness

Thee yonder universe obeys which round the earth for ever

## 112 STOICS, EPICUREANS, AND SCEPTICS

Majestic rolls at thy command, and gladly feels thy guidance  
So mighty is the weapon clenched within thy hands unconquered,

The double-edged and fiery bolt of ever-living lightning  
For Nature through her every part beneath its impulse shudders,

Whereby the universal Scheme (Logos) thou gudest which  
through all things

Proceeding intermingles deep with greater lights and smaller,  
When Thou so vast in essence art, a king supreme for ever

Nor upon earth is any work done without Thee, O Spirit !  
Nor at the æther's utmost height divine, nor in the ocean,  
Save whatsoe'er the infatuate work out from hearts of evil  
But thou by wisdom knowest well to render Odd things even,  
Thou orderest Disorder, and the Unlovely lovely makest  
For so hast thou in one combined the noble with the baser,  
That of the Whole a single Scheme (Logos) arises, everlasting,  
Which men neglect and overlook, as many as are evil  
Unhappy ! who good things to get are evermore desiring,  
While to the common Law of God nor eyes nor ears they open,

Obedient to which they might good life enjoy with wisdom  
But they, in guise unseemly, rush this way and that at random,

One part in glory's chase engaged with ill contending passion,  
Some searching every path of gain, of comeliness forgetful,  
Others on soft indulgence bent, and on the body's pleasure,  
While things right contrary to these their proper action hastens

But Jove all bounteous ! who in clouds enwrap the lightning  
wieldest,

Mayst thou from baneful Ignorance the race of men deliver !  
Thus, Father ! scatter from the soul, and grant that we the wisdom

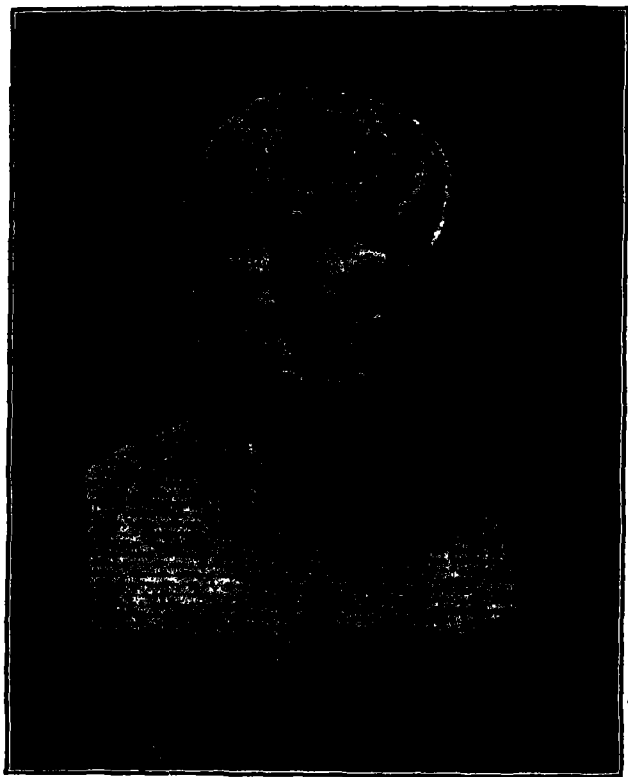
May reach, in confidence of which thou justly gudest all  
things,

That we, by Thee in honour set, with honour may repay Thee,  
Raising to all thy works a hymn perpetual, as becometh  
A mortal soul, since neither man nor god has higher glory  
Than rightfully to celebrate Eternal Law all-ruling

This exalted and affecting religion had, unhappily,  
its reverse side in a tendency to intolerant superstition. When that wonderful scientific genius Aris-

tarchus of Samos put forward his theory that the earth revolves on her axis and is carried annually round the sun, Cleanthes demanded that he should be accused of impiety before all the Greeks for attempting to move Hestia, the hearth of the universe, from her place. How far he succeeded in arousing popular odium is not stated; but the heliocentric theory was nipped in the bud.

Chrysippus, the successor of Cleanthes, carried on the Stoic tradition of high thinking and plain living. He so organised and developed the system that its foundations stood unshaken until the overthrow of all materialism by Plotinus, five centuries later. Meanwhile the demand for a return to Nature was acting powerfully on public taste and opinion. The search for landscape beauty, the enjoyment of country scenes and pleasures, spread widely, and the romantic love of the sexes became a leading motive of idyllic and dramatic poetry. Something like a cry of "Back to the land!" made itself heard in political life. A Stoic philosopher, Sphærus, was associated with the great agrarian reforms carried out by King Cleomenes at Sparta; and in the following century the Gracchi were educated for a similar work by their Stoic tutor Blossius. But the action of this philosophy was conservative no less than revolutionary. It helped to revive among a few the old Roman virtues of frugality and unselfish devotion to the Republic. The most celebrated of its adherents, the younger Cato, by the tradition of his pure life and his martyr-death, long exercised an ennobling influence on Roman opinion. And in the new environment Stoicism received as much as it gave. The rather pedantic ethics of the Porch became what, as has been said, they were not at first—natural, human, and reasonable. This is how they appear in the three great Stoic writers of the Empire, Seneca, Epictëtus, and Marcus Aurelius,

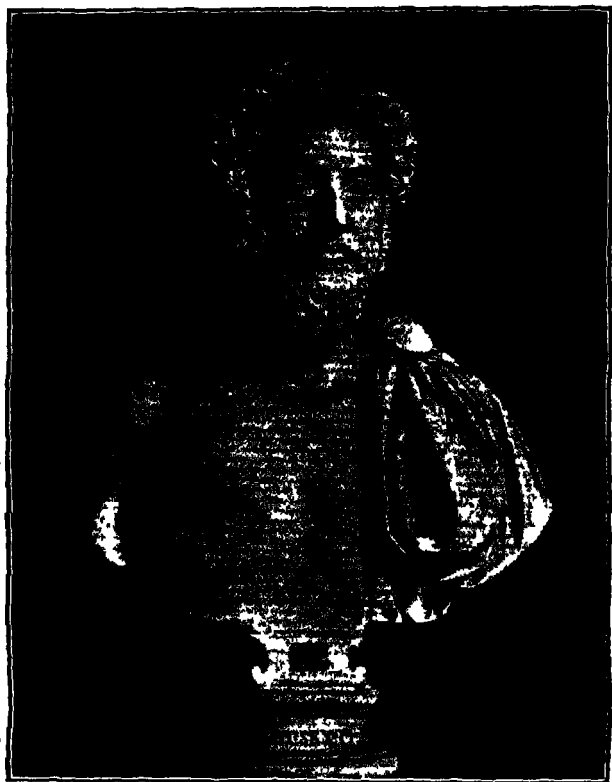


SENECA

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to whom also the system owes whatever popularity it has secured in the Christian world. Seneca, a Spaniard by birth (B.C. 3<sup>d</sup>—A.D. 65), cannot be said, as a statesman, to have lived up to his philosophy; but, in comparison with those of his contemporaries who were exposed to anything like the same temptations, he ranks morally very high. As Prime Minister of the Emperor Nero he was long remembered for five years of exemplary government, and, had the conspiracy against that tyrant, for his alleged participation in which the philosopher suffered death, been successful, it was rumoured, according to the historian Tacitus, that he would have been called to supreme power "on account of his conspicuous virtues." Epictetus belongs to the close of the first and the first part of the second Christian centuries. He was a freedman who taught philosophy, first at Rome and afterwards in southern Epirus. To him we owe the most memorable saying, for its size, that the whole literature of morality has to show: "Bear and forbear." Of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180) it is enough to mention that in all the annals of sovereignty there is none to compare with him but the mythical King Arthur and the historical St. Louis.

The lessons of these three immortal masters may be summed up in the three ideas most distinctly characteristic of Stoicism at its best—Conscience, Duty, and Humanity. The first expresses that combination of liberty and law which most characterises this philosophy on its individualistic side. It means that virtue, to be truly such, must be accepted by me not as an external command, not as sanctioned by threats or promises to be fulfilled either here or hereafter, nor yet as something the possession of which will enhance my self-esteem; but as my own free choice, to be preferred before all other gifts, even were its rejection to be condemned by none but the judge within my



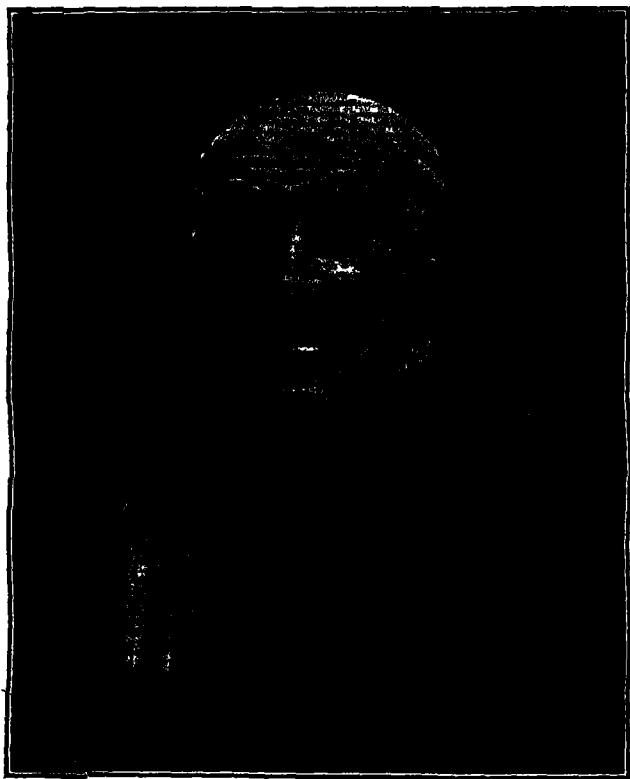
MARCUS AURELIUS.

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breast. This was what the intellectualism, not of the Porch alone, but of all Greek ethics, really amounted to. The great founders knew quite well that no man can be argued into goodness. But they knew also that to be truly good one must recognise the necessity of goodness for a reasonable being by the sort of consent with which we agree to a geometrical demonstration, and with as little deference to any external authority.

The idea of duty gives a specific objective content to the general form of subjective obligation. It had its origin in the Stoic teleology. The divine Logos has constructed this universe as an organism in which every part, even the smallest, has its function to fulfil. And so every human being is born into a set of circumstances, a station in life, where there is something for him to do that nobody else can do as well. So the labourer must make the most of the material supplied; the employer of labour must waste no time in waiting for an ideal society, but must use the men at his disposal for whatever task they can best perform.

The organic conception of the world and of society makes the virtue of humanity an imperative duty. We are all members of one body, and the interest of each is identified with the interest of all. Men love one another by nature, that is to say, mutual affection is the ideal purpose aimed at in their creation; so for them to rob and kill one another, however common may be the practice, is a violation of the very law by which they exist. That the mutual slaughter of human beings should be made an entertaining spectacle, as in the gladiatorial games, was as revolting to Seneca as to us. The same feeling of humanity set itself strongly against the abuses of slavery; and slavery as an institution ran counter to the theory of natural law, on which Stoicism took its stand. Seneca once states that all men are born with equal rights. The same principle was embodied in Roman jurisprudence by great lawyers trained in the Stoic



CARNEADES

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schools; so that Florentinus and Ulpian, followed by Justinian, boldly declare that slavery is contrary to the law of nature, all men being originally born free. Christian legislators afterwards took up the same maxim, and applied it to practice, but without any reference to Christian ethics as such.

### *The Sceptics.*

The elaborate dogmatic systematisation of Stoicism had been originally derived through Aristotle from Plato. But Plato's own successors in the Academy after a time dropped the positive teaching of their founder, applying themselves exclusively to the development of the negative and critical method illustrated by his earlier Dialogues, and perhaps inherited rather from the Humanists Protagoras and Gorgias than from Socrates. Two very eminent thinkers, Arcesilaus (about 315-240 B C) and Carneades (about 213-128 B C) directed a formidable battery of sceptical objections against the philosophy of Chrysippus, the great organising genius of Stoicism. One of their arguments even made for the overthrow of all certainty whatever. Aristippus of Cyrênê, a disciple to some extent of Socrates, had argued that, as all our knowledge consists in the first place of sensations, and that, as these are the result of external impacts which they do not necessarily resemble, we have no certain information about the external world. The New Academicians, as they were called, adopted this agnostic standpoint, and proceeded on that basis to cast doubt on the whole common-sense theory of knowledge as held by the Stoics, reinforcing their argument by a variety of facts tending to throw discredit on the evidence of the senses.

Nor did the Academic criticism stop short at metaphysics. It will be remembered that Stoicism was an essentially religious philosophy. Tending towards

pantheistic monism, it still kept on good terms with the popular mythology by accepting the gods and goddesses of polytheism as personifications of the elements and forces of nature, their scandalous adventures being interpreted as highly moral allegories. The Stoics also extended a large hospitality to the popular Greek religion, which consisted chiefly in a credulous acceptance of oracles and prophecies. These they explained as part of the machinery by which the providential government of the world is carried on. Now, there had always been a distinct current of rationalism among the more educated Greeks; and this had been strongly reinforced by the physical explanations of early philosophy, as well as by its more direct protests against the unworthy stories told of the gods by the old poets. But Carneades, in assailing the Stoic theology, went far beyond these partial criticisms, and covered in advance most of the ground along which all scepticism since his time has moved. Here the materialism of the Stoics laid them more particularly open to his attacks, bringing out as it did with more distinctness what is contradictory in the idea of a personal being conceived as absolute and infinite, and in the idea that all is right in a world where so much is admitted to be all wrong. And he laid his finger on anthropomorphism as the root of every theological fallacy. For the moral and intellectual perfections of man are conditioned by his social and material environment, they are unintelligible in a being without wants, without companions, without bodily senses.

The Stoic ethics did not, any more than the Stoic religion, issue unscathed from the dialectical onslaught of the New Academy. Carneades did not, like Gorgias and Protagoras, deny Nature, but he showed that her first law, self-preservation, is negated by the altruistic ideals of the Porch. For example, justice forbids us to take away the life or property of another.

But in a shipwreck, will not the just man try to save his life at another's expense by seizing the plank of which some weaker person than himself has got hold, especially if they are alone on the sea together? And many more cases of the kind can be easily imagined.

Finally, the opposition between the general and the particular, shown by reason to be so destructive of theology and ethics, was turned against reasoning itself. All reasoning is from first principles assumed to be true. But if you take their truth for granted, there is an end to argument, if you try to prove it, there is no end, for the same difficulty recurs at every step—what is called the infinite regress—so that we are left without any secure foundation to rest on. Or take the particular forms of reasoning, syllogism and induction. It is said that we know Socrates to be mortal because all men are. But either the first proposition is included in the second or it is not. In the one case the syllogism is a mere tautology, adding nothing to our knowledge, in the second case it begs the question. Induction argues that because the known members of a class possess a particular property therefore the unknown members possess it also. But that is a fallacy easily shown to be such by experience.

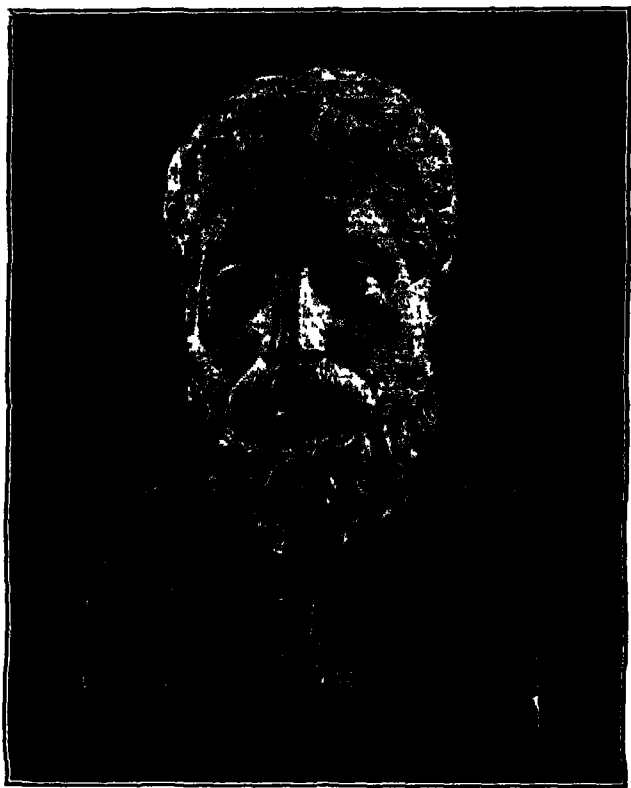
Like our own Bishop Butler, the Academicians took refuge in probability as the guide of life. In practice probabilism seems to mean believing and doing as most fairly well-informed people do, for an exact calculus of probabilities, in the mathematical sense, besides being beyond the reach of Greek science, would bring up all the difficulties of reasoning again. On this ground the Greek Sceptics accepted the popular religion "practically" to the same extent as the Stoics, but with considerably less prospect of raising and purifying it. Where they chiefly worked for good was in dissolving away the hard pedantry of their opponents, and thus aiding that beneficent evolution which,

as we have seen, led on to the noble humanity of Seneca, Epictétus, and Marcus Aurelius.

*Epicureanism.*

The school of philosophy which we have now to consider is generally thrown into a false perspective by the current estimates of modern literature. It is constantly contrasted in a misleading way with Stoicism, as if they respectively represented two opposite poles of thought, the one standing for pleasure and the other for virtue as the highest good ; or, from a different point of view, the one being a school of science and the other of religion. But, as we have seen, the true antithesis of Stoicism is to be found in the New Academy, Epicureanism occupying a position better described as intermediate between the two, although certainly nearer to the Sceptical than to the dogmatic side. As for science, Epicurus was so utterly ignorant of it as to disbelieve in the sphericity of the earth, to declare that the antipodes were impossible, and to believe that the sun, moon, and stars were no larger than they appeared to us to be. His revival of the atomic theory eventually proved a great benefit to physics, but this was not felt until nineteen centuries later. The high scientific enthusiasm of his only great disciple, the Roman poet Lucretius, has led to a complete misconception of the master's position with regard to philosophy in general. What that really was must now be briefly shown.

Epicurus (342-270 B C), though born in Samos, was of Athenian parentage, and much the greater part of his life was spent at Athens. What he knew of natural philosophy seems to have been picked up in the schools of Asia Minor, the old home of such studies. Neither the Athenian spirit nor the spirit of the age would encourage him to carry them very far—no further, indeed, than seemed necessary to secure a



EPICURUS.

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happy life. And, like a much greater Athenian, Plato, Epicurus looked on conduciveness to happiness as the test of truth. At any rate, as between two or more equally probable doctrines, we are to choose the pleasantest or the least alarming. Such a criterion is not unknown among ourselves, but it is most commonly used to turn the scale in favour of some supernaturalist belief. Epicurus, on the contrary, regarded supernaturalist beliefs of every sort as the worst enemies of that freedom from anxiety which to him was the principal condition of human felicity. Now, in his opinion, there was no more fatal cause of anxiety about our future than the fear of what the gods were going to do to us in this life or in the next. In fact, such fears seem to have been responsible for a good deal of mental torture at Athens and elsewhere. Plato and the Stoics sought refuge in the belief that the gods—or God—ordered all things for the best, but their philosophies were difficult to master, and what was worse, they seemed open to insuperable objections. Epicurus adopted a more summary method. He denied that the gods ever interfered with human affairs, and he denied a future life. On both points Aristotle had been beforehand with him, but the Stagirite's real meaning remained open to doubt. There could be no doubt as to what the new philosophy taught. Not atheism, certainly—that would have been most repugnant to Athenian feeling—but what practically came to the same thing—namely, that the immortals never troubled their heads about mundane affairs, being, in fact, glorified Epicureans themselves. And as the soul did not survive the body, nothing need be apprehended from a future state.

Among the earlier Greek philosophies one, the atomism of Democritus, had been thoroughly atheistic, and Epicurus, accordingly, adopted atomism, not—or not primarily—from its scientific merits, but because it relieved him from the necessity of believing

in a divine creation of the world, which would have opened the door for a belief in divine interference with the course of things. But, in deference, as would seem, to contemporary science, he introduced two modifications into the original hypothesis, both, as it happened, of a grossly unscientific character. Leucippus and Democritus had conceived their primordial atoms as flying about void space in all directions and forming fortuitous aggregations held together by converging atomic streams of equally fortuitous origin. Since Aristotle, however, if not earlier, weight had been recognised as an inseparable property of earthy matter. This did not mean a tendency to fall downward for ever through infinite space. It meant, as was justly perceived since astronomy had discovered the earth's true shape, a tendency to fall towards the centre of the earth, which for an Aristotelian was also the centre of the universe. And this demonstrated fact must have proved a death-blow to the old atomism which had no resources for explaining such a mysterious property—a property still inexplicable at the present day. Now, Epicurus knew so little about science as to accept gravitation without the doctrine of a central force, for, as has been already noticed, he rejected the earth's sphericity. The atoms, he said, just fell downwards—for no particular reason—through infinite space through all eternity. Unfortunately he had science enough to know that particles of matter falling in a vacuum would move with the same velocity whatever their shape or relative size. Thus, remaining always at the same distance from one another, they would never aggregate into larger masses. To overcome this difficulty Epicurus credited his atoms with the power of occasionally deflecting their course to a slight extent from the perpendicular line of descent. This singular capacity was illustrated by man's possession of free-will—another Epicurean dogma—which was also regarded

as offering an exception to the law of universal causation. The whole theory may have been suggested by Aristotle, another believer in free-will, who had given chance and spontaneity a certain part in the production of events. The Stoics, who accepted the law of universal causation in its most rigorous sense, were, so far, more in harmony with modern science than either of the competing schools; nor is it clear that Epicurus had any reason for denouncing their fatalism as more destructive to human happiness than his own arbitrary physics. For it seems evident that our mental tranquillity depends largely on the belief that the order of nature will proceed after a certain fixed routine. Nothing, for instance, could well be more alarming than a belief, sincerely entertained, that the moon might at any moment quit her orbit and fall upon the earth. And such a belief would be no more than the logical consequence of crediting her with free-will, or her component atoms with the power of arbitrary deflection.

Those philosophers who appealed to the apparent evidences of design in nature as a proof that it was the work of a superhuman intelligence argued that the chances against such beneficent adaptations having resulted from a fortuitous concourse of atoms were infinite. Epicurus met them with the plea that the infinitely varied collisions of infinite atoms going on through infinite time must chance to produce such a frame of things as we see, not once only, but infinitely often. And this contention might presumably be justified had he begun with such atoms as those assumed by modern science, with attractions, repulsions, polarities, and latent sensibilities forthcoming to any required extent. But from such simple substances as the Epicurean atoms, with no dynamic properties but weight and deflexibility, it were presumably impossible for the simplest form of self-reproductive life to arise.

The strength of Epicureanism did not lie in physics, but in ethics, in its rehabilitation of pleasure, rightly understood, as the sole ultimate good. But here also the want of originality is apparent. For Democritus, besides organising the atomic theory, had formulated a very similar doctrine, and, as we have seen, it had been satisfactorily if rather summarily worked out by Plato in his *Protagoras*, with an additional confirmation in the *Laws*. With Plato and Epicurus alike the system is what Henry Sidgwick has called Egoistic Hedonism. We are to be virtuous from purely prudential considerations, not in order to make other people or the world in general happier, but because by that method we shall best secure our own good, which is defined as pleasure and the absence of pain. Objections to hedonism in modern times have taken the form of denying that pleasure can be made an intelligible object of pursuit; what we want being not a feeling, but a thing. In antiquity the method of attack was rather first to identify pleasure with sensuality, on the ground that bodily pleasures best exemplify what is meant by pleasure in general, and, as against these, to invoke the discredit commonly attached to such indulgence. This was good as against Aristippus and the Cyrenaic school, who actually found the supreme good in the extreme of momentary gratification without regard to the chances of subsequent pain, but not as against the guarded view of Plato during his hedonistic period. And it utterly broke down when confronted by the doubtless sincere declaration of Epicurus that the pleasure derived from the memory of pleasant conversations with a philosophical friend made him perfectly happy on the day that he was dying of a painful disease. Nor was it only the founder of the sect whose greatest happiness lay in the pleasures of social intercourse. Friendship always remained an object of special culture among the Epicureans, and their mutual

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affection was remarked on by all observers. Perhaps a certain want of intellectual energy may have had something to do with the exceptional amiability of these philosophers. Their harmony remained unbroken by any difference of opinion, no disciple ever daring or caring to innovate on the methods and doctrines formulated once for all by the master whom they adored as a god.

## CHAPTER VIII

### NEO-PLATONISM

THE destruction of political freedom and independence in Greece by Macedon, and in the West by Imperial Rome, led to a great religious revival, more or less mixed up with a rank growth of the superstitious practices and beliefs which the stricter organisation of the small city-states had previously held in check. The better sort sought for strength in the sanctuary of the inner life. The ignorance engendered by increasing barbarism, the result of foreign wars and internal militarism, left the masses a helpless prey to the deluding or self-deluded expert in miraculous arts.

Intensified religious feeling and reviving superstition contributed also in varying proportions to that belief in human immortality which the combined evidence of literature and archæology shows to have been continually spreading in the first centuries of the Christian era, but quite apart from Christian influences. Such a hope was intrinsically hostile both to the materialism of the great dogmatic philosophies and to the systematic doubt of the Sceptics. It is true that the Stoics accepted, to some limited extent, a future and even an ante-natal life for the soul. But, in the first place, the limitation of this existence detracted considerably from its value; and, in the second place, the survival of a material soul, in the absence of the body that once contained and protected it, must have seemed, on reflection, as incredible as it was gratuitous. In this respect the Epicureans, who

held that death ended all, were both more courageous and more consistent than their rivals.

Spiritualism as a philosophy does not necessarily carry with it the belief in man's immortality, which, in fact, has been denied by various spiritualist philosophers. But it is certainly more favourable than materialism can be to that belief. And for the same reasons it is more favourable to Theism. A corporeal God cannot easily be thought of as surviving for ever through the ceaseless elemental transformations of Heraclitus, or through the eternal dissolutions and reconstructions of atomism. Thus, under the new conditions created by the Empire, the spiritualisms of Plato and Aristotle found a readier reception than at the time of their first promulgation. And, of the two, Platonism, from its far more markedly religious character, would have the preference.

Plato himself had been half a Pythagorean; and a Pythagorean revival very appropriately paved the way for Neo-Platonism, continuing indeed to co-exist with it until all independent speculation came to an end. Metempsychosis, numerical mysticism, and astrology linked on the popular superstitions to the mathematics and astronomy where the positive science of the future was to find its basis, as well as to the metaphysics on which mediæval thought was to be fed for a thousand years.

Alexandria, the Greek capital of Egypt, was the birthplace of the new philosophy, and to some extent has served for its god-mother as well. But to talk about a School of Alexandria is worse than inaccurate, it is misleading. The great Egyptian emporium was a centre of trade between West and East, so the association of its name with a system of thought gives the idea that it also served as a channel for the importation of Oriental ideas into Europe. But there is nothing Oriental about Neo-Platonism. All its component elements may be traced back to purely

Greek thought. At most a certain grandeur and finality characterising the system as a whole were possibly inspired by the genius of the place where it was first written down, the genius of Imperial Rome. A brief account of Neo-Platonism and its real founder, as also its only great master, will make this clear.

Plotinus (about 205-270 A.D.) was a native of Egypt; but, as he was ashamed of having a body, nothing more particular about his birth and parentage could ever be extracted from him. After trying various schools of philosophy, he attended the lectures of the Alexandrian Platonist, Ammonius Saccas, for eleven years. On the death of that teacher, his first intention was to follow an invading Roman army into Persia with a view to studying the wisdom of the East; but the failure of the expedition turned his steps to Rome, where a numerous band of disciples, including some great ladies, were attracted by his lectures. Nor was it only the intellect of Plotinus that won their admiration. His personal character stood so high that many of his friends submitted their disputes to his arbitration, while others appointed him guardian to their heirs. Dying at sixty-six, his last words were: "I am trying to bring the divinity within me to the divinity in the All."

The writings of Plotinus were edited after his death by his favourite disciple, Porphyry, the famous anti-Christian controversialist, who arranged them according to the rather childishly mystical ideas of the school in six books, each containing nine essays, generally known as the *Enneads*. Fortunately, Porphyry has left on record the chronological order of their composition. It goes to prove that when Plotinus began to write, at the age of fifty, his philosophy was already complete. It is, as Hegel has observed, as much Neo-Aristotelian as Neo-Platonist, and some Stoic elements are also included. Historically, the most important part is the refutation of materialism; for

it was by this, and not, as has been supposed, by the criticism of the Sceptics, that the great dogmatic systems of Epicurus and Chrysippus, which had so long held the field, were destroyed, and the ground prepared for the restoration of the two spiritualist masters whom for five long centuries they had practically superseded.

Our personality, according to Plotinus, cannot be a property of the body, for this is composed of parts, and is in a state of perpetual flux. A man's self, then, is his soul; and the soul cannot be material, for the ultimate elements of matter are inanimate, and it is inconceivable that animation and reason should result from the aggregation of particles which, taken singly, are destitute of both, while, even were it possible, their disposition in a certain order would argue the presence of an intelligence controlling them from without. The Stoics themselves admit the force of these considerations when they attribute reason to the fiery element or vital breath by which, according to them, all things are shaped. They do, indeed, talk about a certain elementary disposition as the principle of animation, but this disposition is either identical with the matter possessing it—in which case the difficulties already mentioned recur—or is distinct from it—in which case the animating principle still remains to be accounted for.

Again, to suppose that the soul shares in the changes of the body is incompatible with the self-identity that memory reveals. To suppose that it is an extended substance is irreconcilable with its simultaneous presence as an indivisible whole at every point to which its activity reaches, as well as with the fact that all our sensations, though received through different organs, are referred to a common centre of consciousness. If the sensorium is a fluid body, it will have no more power of retaining impressions than water has; if it is a solid, new impressions will

not be received at all, or only after the old impressions have been effaced.

Passing from sensation to thought, it is admitted that abstract conceptions are incorporeal; how, then, can they be received and entertained by a corporeal substance? Or what possible connection can there be between different arrangements of material particles and such notions as temperance and justice?

So much for the Stoics. Turning from them to the Epicureans, Plotinus argues that to deduce mind from atoms is even more absurd than to deduce it from the elementary bodies. Granting that the atoms have a natural movement downwards, granting they suffer a lateral deflection, and so impinge on one another, still this could do no more than produce a disturbance in the bodies against which they strike. But to what atomic movement can psychic energies and affections be attributed? What sort of collision in the vertical line of descent, or in the oblique line of deflection, or in any direction you please, will account for the appearance of a particular kind of reasoning or mental impulse or thought, or how can it account for the existence of such processes at all? Plotinus agrees with Epicurus in upholding human free-will as against Stoic fatalism, but, instead of using it as another argument against materialism, he prefers to regard the soul's self-determination as a logical consequence of her spiritual nature.

With the destruction of materialism, the ground was cleared for the construction of a new metaphysical system. Now, the general principle of Greek systematisation was to choose two extreme opposites—by preference the most widely separated that could be found—and to fill up the interval between them by a series of more or less gradual transitions. In Aristotle's philosophy the antithetical terms chosen, or rather created, by him for the purpose had been Actuality and Possibility. The former had been

identified with pure self-thinking Thought or Reason. Although not the creator of the universe—for the universe was eternal—it, or he, was the source of all motion, while itself remaining for ever at rest. The latter, Possibility, was identified with Matter. This, as has been already explained, meant something far more indefinite than the extended and resisting substance to which we give that name, being, in fact, the nearest conceivable approach to non-existence, a neutral entity for ever oscillating between the opposite qualities of wet and dry, cold and hot. The interval between this Matter and the Supreme Reason or sole absolute reality was filled up by the four ancient elements occupying the sublunary sphere or world of mutability and corruption, and the quintessential sphere, first imagined by Aristotle himself, of which the celestial spheres are formed, carried round in perfect circles by their love of the unmoved God.

Plotinus accepted the Aristotelian Matter, in the sense of pure, indeterminate Possibility, as his lowest term, for the highest place he demanded something better still than the eternally self-thinking God of the *Metaphysics*. For, in his opinion, it still involved a remnant of dualism. Between the thought that thinks itself and itself there remains, after all, a logical distinction, an outstanding dualism. Moreover, he had read in Plato's *Republic* of an Ideal Good that transcends even Existence, that makes the existent to be. He had read in the *Timæus* of an Idea of the Same opposed to the Other, and giving rise, by union with the Other, to Existence. Finally, he had read in the *Parmenides* of a mysterious One logically involving the Many, not conceivable as existent without the Many, repeating itself wonderfully in each one of the Many, yet somehow independent of, prior to, and above them all. It seems as if Plato, after tracking that wondrous unity through all the mazes of his incomparable dialectic, had given up the idea as

hopelessly self-contradictory and useless for his great reforming purposes. Plotinus, who was not a practical but a purely speculative genius, took up the abandoned orphan and enthroned it at the very summit of his system, which thereby became the first Western philosophy of mysticism.

It would, however, be a serious mistake to think of Plotinus as solely, or even chiefly, a mystic. The mystical portions of his writings occupy a very small compass; nor does he ever employ mystical considerations instead of rational arguments. Indeed, from the very nature of the case, the One can enter into no creed, for a creed consists of propositions, and every proposition implies duality, seeing that it involves two or more terms. "It is," he tells us, "neither substance, nor quality, nor reason, nor soul, neither moving nor at rest, not in place nor in time; but unique of its kind, or rather kindless, being before all kind, before motion, and before rest—for these belong to being, and are that to which its multiplicity is due. Why, then, if it does not move, is it not at rest? Because, while one or both of these must be attributed to Being, the very act of attribution involves a distinction between subject and predicate which is impossible in the case of what is absolutely simple."

Yet even Plotinus cannot maintain himself at this height of abstraction. Just before the words quoted he has given as a reason why the One should not be anything in particular that "its nature is to generate all things." The explanation of his inconsistency is psychological. With the vision of Imperial Rome ever before his eyes, and made, if anything, more precious by the anarchy of the third century A.D., our philosopher may well have taken unity, which is but a means to an end, as an end in itself, the final cause, and therefore the only true cause of all that is.

The first product of this creative power, the first

step downward in the descending scale of values, is the self-thinking thought, the Nous or Reason, which for Aristotle had counted as the sole perfectly realised Being, love of which made the world go round. But the Nous of the *Enneads* differs from the Nous of the *Metaphysics*, in that it has a far richer content—no less, indeed, than the whole universe of Platonic ideas, the archetypes of all existence. For, in deference, no doubt, to Aristotle's criticism of the master's theory, our Neo-Platonist had come to admit that for an idea to exist without a mind that thinks it is absurd; and as Aristotle himself had defined Nous as the power of ideation, it seemed quite in order that the absolute reason should be the subject of the supreme ideas. But though a thinking subject, and, of course, a purely spiritual substance, it is not personal, and Coleridge, from early youth a student of Plotinus, rightly refers to it as the "selfless mind whose total being is act." The great critic of materialism had no doubt convinced himself through his familiarity with the post-Aristotelian systems that a bodily organism is the necessary condition of that self-consciousness in man which nevertheless it cannot create. Nor, again, must we think of Nous as a self-distinguishing subject existing independently of the Ideas; it exists entire in each one of them; and each of them is a Nous in itself.

The One neither moves nor rests, the Nous rests unmoved, the last downward step in the realm of purely spiritual essences is the World-Soul, herself for ever moving and the source of all movement in nature, which also she connects as a mediating principle with the archetypal sphere of pure reason. Here Plotinus systematises the metaphysical mythology of Plato, who in his *Timæus* makes the cosmic soul a blend of identity, difference, and existence. This World-Soul, being a step further removed from the primordial One, has not the concrete unity of Nous. In the first place,

a higher, or what Emerson would call an Over-Soul, is distinguished from a lower, and the latter again is divided into a number of individuals—the informing psychic principles of the material world and its inhabitants. Plotinus tells us, indeed, that all souls are one; but this must be taken as meaning that they are united by the groundwork of a common spiritual nature, not that each exists entire in every other, as was true of the Ideas and the Nous.

If all souls are one and all ideas are one, it is because the two derivative principles, the rational and the psychic, are at unity not only with themselves and with each other, but, above all, because they are held together by the primordial One whence they spring. In this connection historians of philosophy have talked about a Neo-Platonic Trinity. But that is a misleading term. The divine Triad of Plotinus consists of three units ranged in a descending series, not of three co-equal persons. The One and the Nous have no claim to personality of any kind, nor has the cosmic soul either, although it is credited with some vague sort of consciousness, while this last alone stands on those terms of intimate relationship with mankind which are peculiar to the divine Son in the Christian Trinity. At most we may conjecture that the association of power with the Father and of wisdom with the Son in Catholic theology may have been suggested by the analogous attributes of the One and of the Nous in Plotinus.

The lower soul, parted as it is into a plurality of animating principles, brings us into direct contact with the sensible world. These are spoken of as fallen spirits whose arrogant self-assertion is responsible for their forfeiture of a place in the divine choir. And their immersion in matter, which, according to Plotinus, is the root of all evil, is the origin of the vices by which man's original kinship to God has been obscured. It would be a mistake to say with some

historians that Plotinus makes soul the creator of matter—that is, taking matter in the sense of all Greek philosophy as the residue left when an object either of thought or of sense has been stripped of its attributes. So understood, it is the extreme antithesis of the One and co-eternal with it. Indeed, they are necessary correlates, for it is on matter that the One exercises its infinitely unifying power, in the first instance directly so as to constitute pure Being as a self-contained noetic sphere where the Platonic Ideas are grouped, and in the second instance indirectly through the Nous, drawing all souls into one over-soul. The matter into which the multitude of lower souls, fallen through self-will, descend to shape it into bodies with sensible qualities is described by Plotinus as a mere reflex of that higher matter which is the common substance of the noetic Ideas. Indeed, he nearly hustles it out of existence altogether, although it unfortunately remains real enough to be the sole cause of all the evil in the world. Extremes meet; for the One which is the cause of all good was also declared to be non-existent. We shall see hereafter that these two mysteries are the remote parents of Herbert Spencer's Unknowable.

From that lowest depth of degradation represented by the unthinkable substance of sensible bodies Neo-Platonism, as a practical doctrine, turns back, to ascend step by step the ladder of visible and cogitable existence, until, mounting higher even than the intelligible Ideas of Reason, the soul, breathless and fainting, loses all individuality in ecstatic identification with the One. What distinguishes the method of Plotinus from all other mysticisms is that up to the moment of that ineffable consummation the lofty spirit of Greek rationality still survives to be his guide.

Since what we seek is One, and since we are considering the first principle of all things and the good, he who enters on this quest must not place himself afar from the things

that are first by descending to the things that are last, but he must leave the objects of sense, and, freed from all evil, ascend to the first principle of his own nature, that by becoming one instead of many he may behold the beginning and the One. Therefore he must become Reason, trusting his soul to Reason for guidance and support, that she may wakefully receive what it sees, and with this he must behold the One, not admitting any element of sense, but gazing on the purest with pure Reason and with that which in Reason is first. Should he who addresses himself to this enterprise imagine that the object of his vision possesses magnitude or form, then Reason is not his guide, for such perceptions do not belong to its nature, but to sense and to the opinion that follows on sense. No, we must only pledge Reason to perform what it can do. Reason sees what precedes, or what contains, or what is derived from itself. Pure are the things in it, purer still those which precede, or, rather, that which precedes it. This is neither Reason nor anything that is, for whatever is has the form of existence, whereas this has none, not even an ideal form.

Plotinus himself reached the climax of absorption in the One several times in his life, Porphyry, his favourite disciple, only once. The experience of St. Paul, when he found himself caught up to the third heaven, was probably of the same description, as also may be the ecstasies of the saints. Modern science would call it a hypnotic trance.

Neo-Platonism continued to be the reigning philosophy of the Empire and the last stronghold of Hellenic religion for two and a half centuries after its founder's death. Proclus (412-485 A.D.), the most eminent of his successors, did much to elaborate and systematise the doctrine, but left its essential features unaltered. As a scholar, however, he contributed to the exaltation of Plato's authority at the expense of Aristotle's during the earlier Christian Middle Ages. In 529 the Emperor Justinian put an end to all independent thought by closing the schools of Athens, which Marcus Aurelius had made a State-foundation, con-

fiscating their property, and silencing their professors. Macaulay has assumed that these poor scholars would have remained silent had Justinian asked them what Plato's philosophy had done for the world during the last thousand years. In the light of modern knowledge, we may answer for them that Greek thought had first purified the old religion, and then contributed to what was best in the new Church; that it had kept alive the mathematics and astronomy on which all the positive science of the future was to be based; that it had preserved in atomism an indispensable instrument for modern physics and chemistry, in the Stoic law of universal causation a necessary principle of all thought, in the Aristotelian encyclopædia a programme of all higher education. And they might have added that to the Greek moral philosophy, which Macaulay makes the special butt of his satire, was indirectly due whatever of equity Justinian's own legislation contained.

And so we may fitly conclude with the words of a great jurist, Sir Henry Maine. "Except the blind forces of Nature, nothing moves in this world which is not Greek in its origin"—remembering always that philosophy, the love of wisdom, is the power sent forth from that Prime Mover by whose virtue the sun and stars of the intellectual universe have ever been drawn on.

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