

**EXPERIENCE: THE RISE  
AND DEVELOPMENT OF  
THE CONCEPT IN THE  
HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649329113

Experience: The Rise and Development of the Concept in the History of Philosophy by Marcus Neustaedter

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**MARCUS NEUSTAEDTER**

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HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY**



Univ. of  
California

# EXPERIENCE;

THE RISE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT  
IN THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE DOCTORATE IN PHILOSOPHY

AT THE

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY  
JUNE, 1908

BY

MARCUS NEUSTAEDTER, M. D.

NEW YORK:  
THE GREENWICH PRINTING COMPANY  
1907

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*Meae caræ matri et sanctæ memoriæ  
patris mei, omnibus meis grammaticis et  
rhetoribus, qui mihi principes et ad susci-  
piendam et ingrediendam rationem humani-  
tatis fuerunt atque doctoribus J. P. Gordy  
Carolo Gray Shaw et Roberto McDougall  
quorum praelectiones philosophicas audiui  
maxima cum gratia haec dissertatio inscribitur*

## "INTRODUCTION."

In an exposition of the historical development of the concept of experience we are dealing with an epistemological problem. We must take account at once of the character of this concept and its relation to the mind which is attempting to get at fundamental truths. Such a problem could only arise when the mind begins to reflect upon the possibility of the existence of knowledge and of its origin.

The ancient philosophers could not have raised such a question, for according to them the world in its completeness was taken as a fact, and the question was: How did it get into the mind? They were only concerned with the metaphysical question as to the nature of the first and ultimate principles of a material world order. Even the Sophists, who began to lay stress on the subjective element, were concerned with moral conduct rather than with the problem of knowledge. But in placing emphasis on the importance of looking upon the individual as an end in himself, they rebelled against the existing conditions in philosophy, in which cosmological problems engaged the attention of thinkers, rather than "anthropological" ones. The Sophist movement was characterized by a breaking away from these traditional methods. The new school began to inquire into the validity of all the existing principles and laws. Its members looked upon the individual as a microcosmos in himself, who ought to work out his own destiny. When the habit of inquiring into certain laws was acquired

there was no stop to the progress of it. All possible principles connected with the welfare of the individual were carefully discussed and thus great stress was laid upon the individual. Conclusions previously arrived at were cast aside, and the subject was made the starting point and criterion for truth. Thus the first attempt was made to interpret the world in terms of the individual rather than in the reverse order.

This same attempt characterizes the method of modern philosophy, where the problem of knowledge is a fundamental one. Such a method inevitably leads to the discussion of the nature of experience.

In trying to define true knowledge the Sophists were looking for a criterion of truth. Protagoras then stated his celebrated maxim, "Man is the measure of all things." Things are what they appear to be to the individual. It seems to me that this tendency to find a subjective criterion for truth culminated in the rise of a theory of the idea of experience with the Stoics.

They were really the first thinkers to inquire how we get knowledge and whether it is a given thing to every man. In their uncritical contemplation it was but natural to view the vast scenery before them as projecting its image as it was reflected in the pupil of their fellows. And from these observations they were led to theorize about the part played by the senses and the soul—a duality which was then fully accepted as existing—in the making of a content of consciousness, which they called experience. The senses were, then, the active media through which the objects projected their images upon the soul as upon a blank tablet, or, according to some Stoics, making impressions on it as on a piece of wax. The impression or state was the experience of the earlier Stoics. The more critical of them, however, were not entirely satisfied with this theory and amended it to the effect that the impression thus produced at the same time alters the state of the soul—in which state the