

**OUTLINES FROM PLATO:
AN INTRODUCTION TO
GREEK METAPHYSICS**

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AN INTRODUCTION TO GREEK METAPHYSICS

BY

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P R E F A C E

THIS selection of passages is primarily intended for students of the Oxford school of *Literae Humaniores*, but the compiler hopes that it may also be found useful by any others who are commencing their study of Plato, on its metaphysical or logical side. Some slight experience of teaching, coupled with his own recollection of early days, has convinced him that merely to give pupils a list of references to parallel passages, bearing on any particular point under discussion, is in most cases quite inadequate. And yet no single dialogue, not even one so comprehensive as the *Republic*, can be understood without a knowledge of much contained elsewhere; and to know all about one involves knowing something about all.

The author, however, admits that his original design was not to illustrate Plato. It was rather to put into Greek dress the more permanent problems of Metaphysics in all ages, and to show that the questions which to-day divide philosophers were most of them raised and debated years ago by the Greeks, with all the additional power and lucidity that their unrivalled language lent them. Such an object proved subsequently to be chimerical; and, having determined to draw his illustrations of these problems from the writings of Plato, the compiler was gradually obliged to limit himself to a rudimentary exegesis of Plato. That this contains very likely many serious defects he is well aware, but he trusts that they are not of sufficient moment seriously to mislead beginners,

for whom alone the book is designed. A graver objection, perhaps, may be brought against its method, and many may demur to a procedure which quotes a dialogue of one period in illustration of one belonging to quite another. In answer, the compiler would plead his original design, in accordance with which he has begun with the *Theaetetus*, thus plunging *in medias res*; and he would also ask to be allowed to doubt whether, in spite of the lately accumulated stylistic evidence, it is not still premature to acquiesce in any settled historical order for the dialogues.

A translation has been added on the advice of a friend, and if the author has substituted one of his own for those that were ready to his hand, it was only because again he desired to render the Greek into more modern philosophical terminology, and he is fully conscious of the uncouthness and verbosity he has thereby displayed. The passages are not always continuous, but no trouble will be found, it is hoped, in picking them up from a complete text, which, as far as was accessible, has here been the new Oxford edition. For the sake of readers chiefly occupied with the *Republic* the quotations from this dialogue are printed in heavier type.

The compiler takes this opportunity to thank the friends who have kindly read the selection and helped him with various suggestions. It would be unbecoming to mention these by name in connexion with a work so slight, and might also be misleading, since they are in no wise the sponsors of any thing contained in it.

OXFORD, May 1905.

I. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL STARTING-POINT

BEFORE beginning the study of Metaphysics we **A** need a definition of the term. Amongst many that might pass let us construct two:—

- (a) The investigation of the meaning of Reality ;
- (b) The study of the conditions of Knowledge.

The two easily and naturally run up into each other, since Object and Subject, which they respectively accentuate, cannot be sharply divided.

Now to both alike a solution is obviously suggested by an examination of sense-perception; for the plain man not unnaturally answers that Reality is the world as known by his senses, and that Knowledge lies in the right use of these: in other words he would proceed with Locke, 'by looking into his own understanding and seeing how it wrought.' But as the inquirer, starting thus *ab initio*, keeps himself rigidly to himself, in the attempt to discover what and how he himself knows, it is not surprising that amongst the earliest answers to the problem we get an extreme form of individualism, whose formula is expressed thus:—

Πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἄνθρωπον εἶναι, τῶν μὲν ὄντων ἵ
ὡς ἔστι, τῶν δὲ μὴ ὄντων ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν¹. *Theaet.* 152 A.

'Each man is the measure of all things, constituting by himself both the existence of things

¹ For τὰ μὴ ὄντα see § J.

A 'existent and the non-existence of things non-existent.'

The grounds for this extreme individualism are twofold—(1) subjective, the differences in human organisms, (2) objective, the physical conditions of sensation itself.

- ii (1) Πνέοντος ανέμου τοῦ αὐτοῦ ὁ μὲν ἡμῶν ῥιγοῖ ὁ δ' οὐ; καὶ μάλα. πότερον οὖν τότε αὐτὸ ἐφ' ἑαυτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα ψυχρὸν ἢ οὐ ψυχρὸν φήσομεν; ἢ πεισόμεθα τῷ Πρωταγόρῃ ὅτι τῷ μὲν ῥιγοῦντι ψυχρὸν, τῷ δὲ μὴ οὐ; ἔοικεν. οὐκοῦν καὶ φαίνεται οὕτως ἑκατέρω; ναί. τὸ δὲ γε 'φαίνεται' αἰσθάνεσθαι ἔστιν; ἔστι γάρ· φαντασία ἄρα καὶ αἰσθησις ταῦτόν ἐν τε θερμοῖς καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς τοιοῦτοις· οἷα γὰρ αἰσθάνεται ἕκαστος τοιαῦτα ἑκάστῳ καὶ κινδυνεύει εἶναι. *Theaet.* 152 B.

'With the same wind blowing, does not one of us feel cold and another not? Certainly. In such cases shall we say that the wind itself is cold or not cold, or shall we hold with Protagoras that for him who feels cold it is cold, and for him who does not it is not? I suppose so. In both cases it is a question of appearance? Yes. But appearance implies sensation? Granted. Appearance, therefore, and sensation, in judging of heat and all similar qualities, are identical, if it is true that the reports of each man's senses are what constitute for him reality.'

(2) Sensation is the result of the action of external molecular stimulus (τὸ ποιοῦν) upon the internal nervous organism (τὸ πάσχον). From their interaction arises both the sensation and its object, neither of which exists independently. Indeed phenomena cannot be said to exist at all: they merely come into being (γίνεσθαι) for each sentient subject (τινί).

STARTING-POINT



'Εκ φοράς τε καὶ κινήσεως καὶ κράσεως πρὸς ἄλληλα **A**
 γίνεται πάντα, ἃ δὴ φαμεν εἶναι, οὐκ ὀρθῶς προσαγορεύον- **iii**
 τες· ἔστι μὲν γὰρ οὐδέποτε· οὐδέν, ἀεὶ δὲ γίνεται.

Theaet. 152 D.

'All sensible objects are but temporary products of rhythmical movement and interaction of forces, and though we attribute existence to them we are at fault in our terminology: the truth being that nothing ever exists, but on every occasion merely becomes.'

'Ἐκ τῆς προσβολῆς τῶν ὀμμάτων πρὸς τὴν προσήκουσαν **iv**
 φอรὰν φαίνεται γεγενημένον, οὔτε τὸ προσβάλλον οὔτε τὸ
 προσβαλλόμενον ἔσται, ἀλλὰ μεταξύ τι ἐκάστω ἴδιον
 γεγονός. *Theaet.* 153 E.

'Every visible quality will clearly be a result of contact between the eyes on the one hand and the external motion naturally adapted to affect them on the other: in short, it will be neither that which meets this motion nor the motion that is thus met, but with each individual alike it will be a *tertium quid*,—a product peculiar to himself.'

'Ἐκ τῆς τούτων ὀμίλλας τε καὶ τρίψεως πρὸς ἄλληλα **v**
 γίνεται τὸ μὲν αἰσθητόν, τὸ δὲ αἰσθησις, ἀεὶ συνεκπί-
 πτουσα καὶ γεννωμένη μετὰ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ. *Theaet.* 156 A.

'It is from the mutual relations and contact between these two kinds of motion that there results, on the one hand the sensible object, and on the other the sensation of this object, the latter being always thrown up as a concomitant product with the former.'

Οὔτε γὰρ ποιοῦν ἐστὶ τι πρὶν ἂν τῷ πάσχοντι συνέλθῃ, **vi**
 οὔτε πάσχον πρὶν ἂν τῷ ποιοῦντι. *Theaet.* 157 A.

'The external or objective element has no definite qualification till after contact with the internal or subjective, nor has the latter until it meets the former.'