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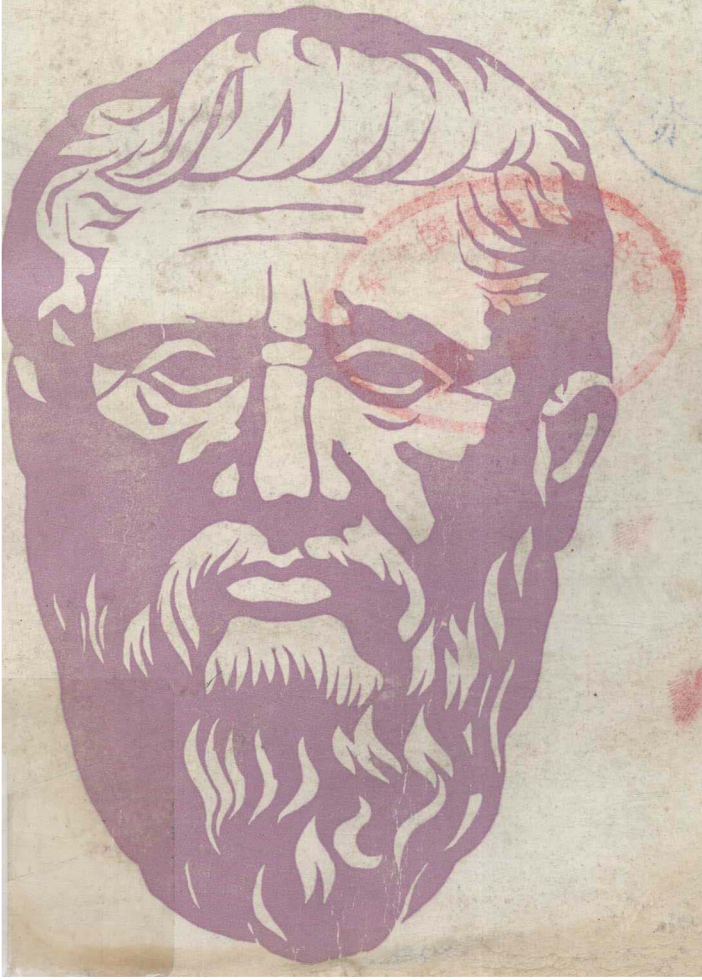
Plato

THE MAN AND HIS WORK

A. E. TAYLOR



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A. E. TAYLOR
late Professor of Moral Philosophy
University of Edinburgh

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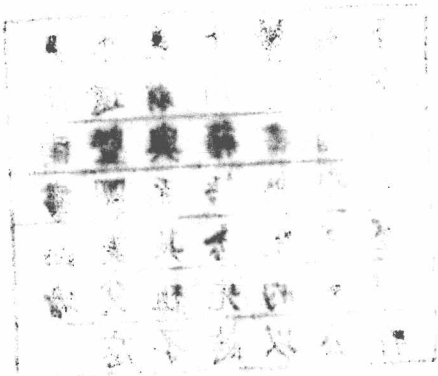

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PLATO

The Man and His Work

Students of philosophy need a book that will tell them just what Plato has to say about the problems of thought and life, and how he says it. Professor Taylor's great work supplies this need. He gives an analysis of the dialogues and places them in their historical setting.

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By the same author

THE ELEMENTS OF METAPHYSICS

PLATO: TIMÆUS AND CRITIAS

(a translation)

TO

ALL TRUE LOVERS OF PLATO, QUICK AND DEAD,

AND IN PARTICULAR TO

PROFESSOR CONSTANTIN RITTER

Vagliami il lungo studio e 'l grande amore

PREFACE

I HOPE two classes of readers may find their account in this book—"Honours students" in our Universities, and readers with philosophical interests, but no great store of Greek scholarship. What both classes most need in a work about Plato is to be told just what Plato has to say about the problems of thought and life, and how he says it. What neither needs is to be told what some contemporary thinks Plato should have said. The sense of the greatest thinker of the ancient world ought not to be trimmed to suit the tastes of a modern neo-Kantian, neo-Hegelian, or neo-realist. Again, to understand Plato's thought we must see it in the right historical perspective. The standing background of the picture must be the social, political, and economic life of the age of Socrates, or, for the *Laws*, of the age of Plato. These considerations have determined the form of the present volume. It offers an analysis of the dialogues, not a systematization of their contents under a set of subject-headings. Plato himself hated nothing more than system-making. If he had a system, he has refused to tell us what it was, and if we attempt to force a system on a mind which was always growing, we are sure to end by misrepresentation. This is why I have tried to tell the reader just what Plato says, and made no attempt to force a "system" on the Platonic text. My own comments are intended to supply exegesis, based as closely as may be on Plato's own words, not to applaud nor to denounce. The result, I hope, is a picture which may claim the merit of historical fidelity. For the same reason I have been unusually careful to determine the date and historical setting assumed for each dialogue. We cannot really understand the *Republic* or the *Gorgias* if we forget that the Athens of these conversations is meant to be the Athens of Nicias or Cleon, not the very different Athens of Plato's own manhood, or if we find polemic against Isocrates, in talk supposed to have passed at a time when Isocrates was a mere boy. If it were not that the remark might sound immodest, I would say that the model I have had before me is Grote's great work on the *Companions of Socrates*. Enjoying

neither Grote's superb scholarship nor his freedom from limitations of space, I have perhaps the compensation of freedom from the prejudices of a party. Whatever bias I may have in metaphysics or in politics, I have tried to keep it out of my treatment of Plato.

I must apologize for some unavoidable omissions. I have been unable to include a chapter on the Academy in the generation after Plato and Aristotle's criticisms of it; I have had to exclude from consideration the minor *dubia* and the *spuria* of the Platonic *corpus*; I have passed very lightly over much of the biology of the *Timaeus*. These omissions have been forced on me by the necessity of saying what I have to say in one volume of moderate compass. For the same reason I have had to make my concluding chapter little more than a series of hints. This omission will, I trust, be remedied by the publication of a study, "Forms and Numbers," which will, in part, appear in *Mind* simultaneously with the issue of this volume. The details of the *Timaeus* are fully dealt with in a Commentary now in course of printing at the Clarendon Press. A brief account—better than none—of the transmission of the Platonic tradition will be found in my little book, *Platonism and its Influence* (1924; Marshall Jones Co., Boston, U.S.A.; British Agents, Harrap & Son).

Want of space has sometimes forced me to state a conclusion without a review of the evidence, but I hope I have usually indicated the quarters where the evidence may be sought. May I say, once for all, that this book is no "compilation"? I have tried to form a judgment on all questions, great and small, for myself, and mention of any work, ancient or modern, means, with the rarest of exceptions, that I have studied it from one end to the other.

There remains the grateful duty of acknowledging obligations. I am a debtor to many besides those whom I actually quote, and I hope I have not learned least from many whose views I feel bound to reject. In some cases I have echoed a well-known phrase or accepted a well-established result without express and formal acknowledgment. It must be understood that such things are mere consequences of the impossibility of excessive multiplication of footnotes, and that I here, once for all, request any one from whom I may have made such a loan to accept my thanks. The recommendations at the ends of chapters are not meant to be exhaustive nor necessarily to imply agreement with all that is said in the work or chapter recommended. The last thing I should wish is that my readers should see Plato through my spectacles. I wish here to make general mention of obligation to a host of scholars of our own time, such as Professors Apelt, Parmentier, Robin, Dr.

Adolfo Levi, the late Dr. James Adam, and others, besides those whose names recur more frequently in my pages. The immense debt of my own generation to scholars of an earlier date, such as Grote, Zeller, Diels, Baeumker, Bonitz, is too obvious to need more than this simple reference.

To two living scholars I must make very special acknowledgment. How much I owe to the published writings of my friend and colleague in Scotland, Professor Burnet, will be apparent on almost every page of my book ; I owe even more to suggestions of every kind received during a personal intercourse of many years. I owe no less to Professor C. Ritter of Tübingen, who has given us, as part of the work of a life devoted to Platonic researches, the best existing commentary on the *Laws* and the finest existing full-length study of Plato and his philosophy as a whole. One cannot despair of one's kind when one remembers that such a work was brought to completion in the darkest years Europe has known since 1648. It is a great honour to me that Dr. Ritter has allowed me to associate his name with this poor volume. Finally, I thank the publishers for their kindness in allowing the book to run to such a length.

A. E. TAYLOR

EDINBURGH, *July* 1926

NOTE TO SECOND EDITION

THIS Second Edition only differs from the first by the correction of misprints, the addition of one or two references and the modification of a few words in two or three of the footnotes.

A. E. TAYLOR

EDINBURGH, *March* 1927

NOTE TO THIRD EDITION

APART from minor corrections and some additions to the references appended to various chapters, this edition only differs from its precursors by the presence of a Chronological Table of Dates and an *Appendix*, dealing briefly with the *dubia* and *spuria* of the Platonic tradition. (I have, for convenience' sake, included in this a short account of a number of Platonic epistles which I myself believe to be neither dubious nor spurious, but have not had occasion to cite in the body of the book.) I should explain that this essay was substantially written in 1926, though it has been revised since.

I take this opportunity of mentioning the following recent works, to which I should have been glad to give more specific references in the text, had they come into my hands a little sooner. All will be found valuable by the serious student of Plato.

STENZEL, J.—*Platon der Erzieher.* (Leipzig, 1928.)
SOLMSEN, F.—*Der Entwicklung der Aristotelischen Logik und Rhetorik.* (Berlin, 1929.)
WALZER, R.—*Magna Moralia und Aristotelische Ethik.* (Berlin, 1929.)
TOEPLITZ, O.—*Das Verhältnis von Mathematik und Ideenlehre bei Plato,* in *Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Mathematik I.* 1. (Berlin, 1929.)
ROBIN, L.—*Greek Thought and the Origins of the Scientific Spirit.* (E. Tr. from the revised edition of the author's *La Pensée Grecque,* London, 1928.)

A. E. TAYLOR.

EDINBURGH, *July,* 1929

NOTE TO FOURTH EDITION

I HAVE made few changes in this new edition of the text, though I have been led to rewrite one or two paragraphs in the chapter on the *Timaeus* by study of Professor Cornford's valuable commentary on his translation of the dialogue. I have tried to remove misprints and detected errors throughout. Among works important for the student of Plato published since the earlier editions of this book I could mention in particular the following:

FRUTIGER, P.—*Les Mythes de Platon.* (Paris, 1930.)
SHOREY, P.—*What Plato Said.* (Chicago, 1933.)
NOVOTNÝ, F.—*Platonis Epistulae.* (Brno, 1930.)
HARWARD, J.—*The Platonic Epistles.* (E. Tr. Cambridge, 1932.)
FIELD, G. C.—*Plato and His Contemporaries.* (London, 1930.)
CORNFORD, F. M.—*Plato's Cosmology, the Timaeus of Plato translated with a running commentary.* (London, 1937.)
SCHULL, P. M.—*Essai sur la Formation de la Pensée Grecque.* (Paris, 1934.)

A. E. TAYLOR.

THE following abbreviations have occasionally been used:

E.G.Ph.[3] = BURNET, *Early Greek Philosophy* (3rd edition), 1920.

E.R.E. = HASTINGS, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, 1908–1921.

R.P. = RITTER AND PRELLER, *Historia Philosophiae Graecae* (9th edition), 1913.

CONTENTS

PLATO
THE MAN AND HIS WORK

CHAPTER I

THE LIFE OF PLATO[1]

PLATO, son of Ariston and Perictione, was born in the month Thargelion (May–June) of the first year of the eighty-eighth Olympiad by the reckoning of the scholars of Alexandria, 428–7 B.C. of our own era, and died at the age of eighty or eighty-one in Ol. 108.1 (348–7 B.C.). These dates rest apparently on the authority of the great Alexandrian chronologist Eratosthenes and may be accepted as certain. Plato's birth thus falls in the fourth year of the Archidamian war, in the year following the death of Pericles, and his death only ten years before the battle of Chaeronea, which finally secured to Philip of Macedon the hegemony of the Hellenic world. His family was, on both sides, one of the most distinguished in the Athens of the Periclean age. On the father's side the pedigree was traditionally believed to go back to the old kings of Athens, and through them to the god Posidon. On the mother's side the descent is equally illustrious and more his-

[1] The chief extant lives are: (*a*) Apuleius, *de Platone*, i. 1–4; (*b*) Diogenes Laertius, iii. 1 (critical edition, Basle, 1907); (*c*) Olympiodorus (*Platonis Opera*, ed. Hermann, vi. 190–195). The least bad of these is (*b*), which appears to have been originally composed for a lady amateur of Platonic philosophy (φιλοπλάτωνι δέ σοι δικαίως ὑπαρχούσῃ, § 47), not before the latter part of the first century of our era. The one or two references to the scholar Favorinus of Arles may possibly be later marginal annotations by an owner or copier of the text. If they are original, they would bring down the date of the *Life* to the latter part of the second century A.D. In the main Diogenes Laertius appears to give the version of Plato's life accepted by the *literati* of Alexandria. But we can see from what we know of the work of Alexandrians like Sotion, Satyrus, and Hermippus, that biographies were already being ruined by the craze for romantic or piquant anecdote before the end of the third century B.C. In Plato's case there is a peculiar reason for suspicion of Alexandrian narratives. The writers were largely dependent on the assertions of Aristoxenus of Tarentum, a scholar of Aristotle who had known the latest generation of the fourth century Pythagoreans. Aristoxenus has long been recognized as a singularly mendacious person, and he had motives for misrepresenting both Socrates and Plato. See Burnet, *Greek Philosophy, Part I.*, p. 153.

torically certain, and is incidentally recorded for us by Plato himself in the *Timaeus*. Perictione was sister of Charmides and cousin of Critias, both prominent figures in the brief "oligarchic" anarchy which followed on the collapse of Athens at the end of the Peloponnesian war (404–3 B.C.). The grandfather of this Critias, Plato's maternal great-grandfather, was another Critias, introduced in the *Timaeus*, whose own great-grandfather Dropides was a "friend and kinsman" of Solon, the great Attic legislator. The father of this Dropides, also called Dropides, the first member of the house who figures in authentic history, was the archon of the year 644 B.C. Besides Plato himself, Ariston and Perictione had at least three other children. These were two older sons, Adimantus and Glaucon, who appear as young men in Plato's *Republic*, and a daughter Potone. Ariston appears to have died in Plato's childhood; his widow then married her uncle Pyrilampes, whom we know from the allusions of the comic poets to have been a personal intimate of Pericles as well as a prominent supporter of his policy. Pyrilampes was already by a former marriage the father of the handsome Demus, the great "beauty" of the time of the Archidamian war; by Perictione he had a younger son Antiphon who appears in Plato's *Parmenides*, where we learn that he had given up philosophy for horses.[1]

These facts are of considerable importance for the student of Plato's subsequent career. Nothing is more characteristic of him than his lifelong conviction that it is the imperative duty of the philosopher, whose highest personal happiness would be found in the life of serene contemplation of truth, to make the supreme sacrifice of devoting the best of his manhood to the service of his fellows as a statesman and legislator, if the opportunity offers. Plato was not content to preach this doctrine in the *Republic*; he practised it, as we shall see, in his own life. The emphasis he lays on it is largely explained when we remember that from the first he grew up in a family with traditions of Solon and accustomed through several generations to play a prominent part in the public life of the State. Something of Plato's remarkable insight into the realities of political life must, no doubt, be set down to early upbringing in a household of "public men." So, too, it is important to remember, though it is too often forgotten, that the most receptive years of Plato's early life must have been spent in the household of his stepfather, a prominent figure of the Periclean *régime*. Plato has often been accused of a bias against "democracy." If he had such a bias, it is not to be accounted for by the influence of early surroundings. He must have been originally indoctrinated with "Periclean" politics; his dislike of them in later life, so far as it

[1] See the family tree in Burnet, *Greek Philosophy, Part I.*, Appendix I., p. 357. For Pyrilampes, cf. *Charmides*, 158*a*, and for Demus, *Gorgias*, 481*d* 5, Aristophanes, *Wasps*, 98. According to *Ep.* xiii. 361*e*, Perictione was still alive at the date of writing (*i.e.* about 366), but her death was expected, as Plato speaks of the expense of the funeral as one which he will shortly have to meet. Nothing is known of Pyrilampes after the battle of Delium (424 B.C.).

is real at all, is best intelligible as a consequence of having been "behind the scenes." If he really disliked democracy, it was not with the dislike of ignorance but with that of the man who has known too much.

The actual history of Plato's life up to his sixtieth year is almost a blank. In his own dialogues he makes a practice of silence about himself, only broken once in the *Apology*, where he names himself as one of the friends who urged Socrates to increase the amount of the fine he proposed on himself from one mina to thirty and offered to give security for the payment, and again in the *Phaedo*, where he mentions an illness as the explanation of his absence from the death-scene.[1] Aristotle adds the one further detail that Plato had been "in his youth familiar with" the Heraclitean Cratylus, though we cannot be absolutely sure that this is more than a conjecture of Aristotle's own. The later writers of the extant *Lives* of Plato add some details, but these are mainly of a purely anecdotal kind and not to be implicitly trusted. In any case their scraps of anecdote throw no light on Plato's life or character and we may safely neglect them here. All we can be sure of, down to Plato's twenty-sixth year, is that the influence of friendship with Socrates must have been the most potent force in the moulding of his mind. (We may add that if Aristotle's statement about Cratylus[2] really is more than an inference, the Heraclitean doctrine, learned from Cratylus, that the world disclosed to us by our senses is a scene of incessant and incalculable mutability and variation, was one which Plato never forgot. He drew, says Aristotle, the conclusion that since there is genuine science, that of which science treats must be something other than this unresting "flux" of sense-appearances.)

The gossiping Alexandrian biographers represented Plato as "hearing" Socrates at the age of eighteen or twenty. This cannot mean that his first introduction to Socrates took place at that age. We know from Plato himself that Socrates had made the close acquaintance of Plato's uncle Charmides in the year 431, and was even then familiar with Critias.[3] Presumably Plato's acquaintance with Socrates, then, went back as far as he could remember. The Alexandrian tales will only mean that Plato became a "disciple" of Socrates as soon as he was an ἔφηβος or "adolescent," a period of life currently reckoned as beginning at eighteen and ending at twenty. Even with this explanation the story is probably not accurate. Both Plato and Isocrates, his older contemporary, emphatically deny that Socrates ever had any actual "disciples" whom he "instructed," and Plato himself, in a letter written nearly at the end of his life, puts the matter in a truer light. He tells us there that at the time of the "oligarchical" usurpation of 404–3, being still a very young man, he was looking forward to a political career and was urged by relatives who were among the revolutionaries (no doubt, Critias and Charmides) to enter public life

[1] *Apology*, 38*b* 6, *Phaedo*, 59*b* 10. [2] Aristotle, *Met.* 987*a* 32.
[3] See the opening pages of the *Charmides*.

under their auspices, but waited to see first what their policy would be. He was horrified to find that they soon showed signs of lawless violence, and finally disgusted when they attempted to make his "elderly friend Socrates," the best man of his time, an accomplice in the illegal arrest and execution of a fellow-citizen whose property they intended to confiscate. The leaders of restored democracy did worse, for they actually put Socrates to death on an absurd charge of impiety. This, Plato says, put an end to his own political aspirations. For in politics nothing can be achieved without a party, and the treatment of Socrates by both the Athenian factions proved that there was no party at Athens with whom an honourable man could work. The suggestion clearly made here is that Plato did not regard Socrates as, properly speaking, a master. He loved him personally as a young man loves a revered elder friend, and he thought of him as a martyr. But it was not until the actual execution of Socrates opened his eyes once for all that he gave up his original intention of taking up active political life as his career. His original aspirations had been those of the social and legislative reformer, not those of the thinker or man of science.[1]

Hermodorus,[2] an original member of Plato's Academy, stated that for the moment the friends of Socrates felt themselves in danger just after his death, and that Plato in particular, with others, withdrew for a while to the neighbouring city of Megara under the protection of Euclides of that city, a philosopher who was among the foreign friends present at the death of Socrates and combined certain Socratic tenets with the Eleaticism of Parmenides. This temporary concentration at Megara presumably would only last until the feelings aroused in connexion with the *cause célèbre* had had time to blow over. The biographers narrate that it was followed by some years of travel to Cyrene, Italy, and Egypt, and that the Academy was then founded on Plato's return to Athens. How much of this story—none of it rests, like the mention of the sojourn in Megara, on the evidence of Hermodorus—may be true, is very doubtful. Plato himself, in the letter already alluded to, merely says that he visited Italy and Sicily at the age of forty and was repelled by the sensual luxury of the life led there by the well-to-do. His language on the whole implies that most of the time between this journey and the death of Socrates had been spent at Athens, watching the public conduct of the city and drawing the conclusion that good government can only be expected when "either true and genuine philosophers find their way to political authority or powerful politicians by the favour of Providence take to true philosophy." He says nothing of travels in Africa or Egypt, though some of the observations made in the *Laws* about the art and music, the arithmetic and the games of the Egyptian children have the appearance of being first-hand. The one fateful result of Plato's "travels," in any case, is that he won the whole-hearted devotion of a young man of ability and

[1] See the full explanation of all this at *Ep.* vii. 324*b* 8–326*b* 4. [2] D.L., iii. 6.

promise, Dion, son-in-law of the reigning "tyrant" of Syracuse, Dionysius I.[1]

The founding of the Academy is the turning-point in Plato's life, and in some ways the most memorable event in the history of Western European science. For Plato it meant that, after long waiting, he had found his true work in life. He was henceforth to be the first president of a permanent institution for the prosecution of science by original research. In one way the career was not a wholly unprecedented one. Plato's rather older contemporary Isocrates presided in the same way over an establishment for higher education, and it is likely that his school was rather the older of the two. The novel thing about the Platonic Academy was that it was an institution for the prosecution of *scientific* study. Isocrates, like Plato, believed in training young men for public life. But unlike Plato he held the opinion of the "man in the street" about the uselessness of science. It was his boast that the education he had to offer was not founded on hard and abstract science with no visible humanistic interest about it; he professed to teach "opinions," as we should say, to provide the ambitious aspirant to public life with "points of view," and to train him to express his "point of view" with the maximum of polish and persuasiveness. This is just the aim of "journalism" in its best forms, and Isocrates is the spiritual father of all the "essayists," from his own day to ours, who practise the agreeable and sometimes beneficial art of saying nothing, or saying the commonplace, in a perfect style. He would be the "Greek Addison" but for the fact that personally he was a man of real discernment in political matters and, unlike Addison, really had something to say. But it is needless to remark that an education in humanistic commonplace has never really proved the right kind of training to turn out great men of action. Plato's rival scheme meant the practical application to education of the conviction which had become permanent with him that the hope of the world depends on the union of political power and genuine science. This is why the pure mathematics—the one department of sheer hard thinking which had attained any serious development in the fourth century B.C.—formed the backbone of the curriculum, and why in the latter part of the century the two types of men who were successfully turned out in the Academy were original mathematicians and skilled legislators and admini-

[1] I have said nothing of the story related, *e.g.*, in D.L., iii., 18–21, that Dionysius I had Plato kidnapped and handed over to a Spartan admiral who exposed him for sale at Aegina, where he was ransomed by an acquaintance from Cyrene. The story, though quite possible, seems not too probable, and looks to be no more than an anecdote intended to blacken the character of Dionysius, who in fact, though masterful enough, was neither brute nor fool. In spite of the counter-assertion of Diels, it is pretty certainly *not* referred to in Aristotle, *Physics*, B 199*b* 13. Simplicius seems clearly right in supposing that Aristotle's allusion is to some situation in a comedy. The statement that Dionysius *attempted* to kidnap Plato is made earlier by Cornelius Nepos, *Dion*, c. 2, and perhaps comes from the Sicilian historian Timaeus.