

AN INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

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NEW YORK

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

LONDON: MACMILLAN & CO., LTD.

1926

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AN INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

PREFACE

As there cannot be said to be a beaten path in philosophy, and as "Introductions" to the subject differ widely from one another, it is proper that I should give an indication of the scope of the present volume.

It undertakes:—

1. To point out what the word "philosophy" is made to cover in our universities and colleges at the present day, and to show why it is given this meaning.

2. To explain the nature of reflective or philosophical thinking, and to show how it differs from common thought and from science.

3. To give a general view of the main problems with which philosophers have felt called upon to deal.

4. To give an account of some of the more important types of philosophical doctrine which have arisen out of the consideration of such problems.

5. To indicate the relation of philosophy to the so-called philosophical sciences, and to the other sciences.

6. To show, finally, that the study of philosophy is of value to us all, and to give some practical admonitions on spirit and method. Had these admonitions been impressed upon me at a time when I was in especial need of guidance, I feel that they would have spared me no little anxiety and confusion of mind. For this reason, I recommend them to the attention of the reader.

Such is the scope of my book. It aims to tell what philosophy is. It is not its chief object to advocate a particular type of doctrine. At the same time, as it is impossible to treat of the problems of philosophy except from some point

of view, it will be found that, in Chapters III to XI, a doctrine is presented. It is the same as that presented much more in detail, and with a greater wealth of reference, in my "System of Metaphysics," which was published a short time ago. In the Notes in the back of this volume, the reader will find references to those parts of the larger work which treat of the subjects more briefly discussed here. It will be helpful to the teacher to keep the larger work on hand, and to use more or less of the material there presented as his undergraduate classes discuss the chapters of this one. Other references are also given in the Notes, and it may be profitable to direct the attention of students to them.

The present book has been made as clear and simple as possible, that no unnecessary difficulties may be placed in the path of those who enter upon the thorny road of philosophical reflection. The subjects treated are deep enough to demand the serious attention of any one; and they are subjects of fascinating interest. That they are treated simply and clearly does not mean that they are treated superficially. Indeed, when a doctrine is presented in outline and in a brief and simple statement, its meaning may be more readily apparent than when it is treated more exhaustively. For this reason, I especially recommend, even to those who are well acquainted with philosophy, the account of the external world contained in Chapter IV.

For the doctrine I advocate I am inclined to ask especial consideration on the ground that it is, on the whole, a justification of the attitude taken by the plain man toward the world in which he finds himself. The experience of the race is not a thing that we may treat lightly.

Thus, it is maintained that there is a real external world presented in our experience — not a world which we have a right to regard as the sensations or ideas of any mind. It is maintained that we have evidence that there are minds in certain relations to that world, and that we can, within

certain limits, determine these relations. It is pointed out that the plain man's belief in the activity of his mind and his notion of the significance of purposes and ends are not without justification. It is indicated that theism is a reasonable doctrine, and it is held that the human will is free in the only proper sense of the word "freedom." Throughout it is taken for granted that the philosopher has no private system of weights and measures, but must reason as other men reason, and must prove his conclusions in the same sober way.

I have written in hopes that the book may be of use to undergraduate students. They are often repelled by philosophy, and I cannot but think that this is in part due to the dry and abstract form in which philosophers have too often seen fit to express their thoughts. The same thoughts can be set forth in plain language, and their significance illustrated by a constant reference to experiences which we all have—experiences which must serve as the foundation to every theory of the mind and the world worthy of serious consideration.

But there are many persons who cannot attend formal courses of instruction, and who, nevertheless, are interested in philosophy. These, also, I have had in mind; and I have tried to be so clear that they could read the work with profit in the absence of a teacher.

Lastly, I invite the more learned, if they have found my "System of Metaphysics" difficult to understand in any part, to follow the simple statement contained in the chapters above alluded to, and then to return, if they will, to the more bulky volume.

GEORGE STUART FULLERTON.

NEW YORK, 1906.

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Set up and electrotyped. Published October, 1906.

**Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing Co. — Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.**

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AN INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

I. INTRODUCTORY

CHAPTER I

THE MEANING OF THE WORD "PHILOSOPHY" IN THE PAST AND IN THE PRESENT

I MUST warn the reader at the outset that the title of this chapter seems to promise a great deal more than he will find carried out in the chapter itself. To tell all that philosophy has meant in the past, and all that it means to various classes of men in the present, would be a task of no small magnitude, and one quite beyond the scope of such a volume as this. But it is not impossible to give within small compass a brief indication, at least, of what the word once signified, to show how its signification has undergone changes, and to point out to what sort of a discipline or group of disciplines educated men are apt to apply the word, notwithstanding their differences of opinion as to the truth or falsity of this or that particular doctrine. Why certain subjects of investigation have come to be grouped together and to be regarded as falling within the province of the philosopher, rather than certain other subjects, will, I hope, be made clear in the body of the work. Only an indication can be given in this chapter.

1. **The Beginnings of Philosophy.**—The Greek historian Herodotus (484–424 B.C.) appears to have been the first to use the verb "to philosophize." He makes Croesus tell Solon how

he has heard that he "from a desire of knowledge has, philosophizing, journeyed through many lands." The word "philosophizing" seems to indicate that Solon pursued knowledge for its own sake, and was what we call an investigator. As for the word "philosopher" (etymologically, a lover of wisdom), a certain somewhat unreliable tradition traces it back to Pythagoras (about 582-500 B.C.). As told by Cicero, the story is that, in a conversation with Leon, the ruler of Phlius, in the Peloponnesus, he described himself as a philosopher, and said that his business was an investigation into the nature of things.

At any rate, both the words "philosopher" and "philosophy" are freely used in the writings of the disciples of Socrates (470-399 B.C.), and it is possible that he was the first to make use of them. The seeming modesty of the title philosopher — for etymologically it is a modest one, though it has managed to gather a very different signification with the lapse of time — the modesty of the title would naturally appeal to a man who claimed so much ignorance as Socrates; and Plato represents him as distinguishing between the lover of wisdom and the wise, on the ground that God alone may be called wise. From that date to this the word "philosopher" has remained with us, and it has meant many things to many men. But for centuries the philosopher has not been simply the investigator, nor has he been simply the lover of wisdom.

An investigation into the origin of words, however interesting in itself, can tell us little of the uses to which words are put after they have come into being. If we turn from etymology to history, and review the labors of the men whom the world has agreed to call philosophers, we are struck by the fact that those who head the list chronologically appear to have been occupied with crude physical speculations, with attempts to guess what the world is made out of, rather than with that somewhat vague something that we call philosophy to-day.

Students of the history of philosophy usually begin their

studies with the speculations of the Greek philosopher Thales (b. 624 B.C.). We are told that he assumed water to be the universal principle out of which all things are made, and that he maintained that "all things are full of gods." We find that Anaximander, the next in the list, assumed as the source out of which all things proceed and that to which they all return "the infinite and indeterminate"; and that Anaximenes, who was perhaps his pupil, took as his principle the all-embracing air.

This trio constitutes the Ionian school of philosophy, the earliest of the Greek schools; and one who reads for the first time the few vague statements which seem to constitute the sum of their contributions to human knowledge is impelled to wonder that so much has been made of the men.

This wonder disappears, however, when one realizes that the appearance of these thinkers was really a momentous thing. For these men turned their faces away from the poetical and mythologic way of accounting for things, which had obtained up to their time, and set their faces toward Science. Aristotle shows us how Thales may have been led to the formulation of his main thesis by an observation of the phenomena of nature. Anaximander saw in the world in which he lived the result of a process of evolution. Anaximenes explains the coming into being of fire, wind, clouds, water, and earth, as due to a condensation and expansion of the universal principle, air. The boldness of their speculations we may explain as due to a courage born of ignorance, but the explanations they offer are scientific in spirit, at least.

Moreover, these men do not stand alone. They are the advance guard of an army whose latest representatives are the men who are enlightening the world at the present day. The evolution of science — taking that word in the broad sense to mean organized and systematized knowledge — must be traced in the works of the Greek philosophers from Thales down.

Here we have the source and the rivulet to which we can trace back the mighty stream which is flowing past our own doors. Apparently insignificant in its beginnings, it must still for a while seem insignificant to the man who follows with an unreflective eye the course of the current.

It would take me too far afield to give an account of the Greek schools which immediately succeeded the Ionic: to tell of the Pythagoreans, who held that all things were constituted by numbers; of the Eleatics, who held that "only Being is," and denied the possibility of change, thereby reducing the shifting panorama of the things about us to a mere delusive world of appearances; of Heraclitus, who was so impressed by the constant flux of things that he summed up his view of nature in the words: "Everything flows"; of Empedocles, who found his explanation of the world in the combination of the four elements, since become traditional, earth, water, fire, and air; of Democritus, who developed a materialistic atomism which reminds one strongly of the doctrine of atoms as it has appeared in modern science; of Anaxagoras, who traced the system of things to the setting in order of an infinite multiplicity of different elements, — "seeds of things," — which setting in order was due to the activity of the finest of things, Mind.

It is a delight to discover the illuminating thoughts which came to the minds of these men; and, on the other hand, it is amusing to see how recklessly they launched themselves on boundless seas when they were unprovided with chart and compass. They were like brilliant children, who know little of the dangers of the great world, but are ready to undertake anything. These philosophers regarded all knowledge as their province, and did not despair of governing so great a realm. They were ready to explain the whole world and everything in it. Of course, this can only mean that they had little conception of how much there is to explain, and of what is meant by scientific explanation.

It is characteristic of this series of philosophers that their attention was directed very largely upon the external world. It was natural that this should be so. Both in the history of the race and in that of the individual, we find that the attention is seized first by material things, and that it is long before a clear conception of the mind and of its knowledge is arrived at. Observation precedes reflection. When we come to think definitely about the mind, we are all apt to make use of notions which we have derived from our experience of external things. The very words we use to denote mental operations are in many instances taken from this outer realm. We "direct" the attention; we speak of "apprehension," of "conception," of "intuition." Our knowledge is "clear" or "obscure"; an oration is "brilliant"; an emotion is "sweet" or "bitter." What wonder that, as we read over the fragments that have come down to us from the Pre-Socratic philosophers, we should be struck by the fact that they sometimes leave out altogether and sometimes touch lightly upon a number of those things that we regard to-day as peculiarly within the province of the philosopher. They busied themselves with the world as they saw it, and certain things had hardly as yet come definitely within their horizon.

2. **The Greek Philosophy at its Height.** — The next succeeding period sees certain classes of questions emerge into prominence which had attracted comparatively little attention from the men of an earlier day. Democritus of Abdera, to whom reference has been made above, belongs chronologically to this latter period, but his way of thinking makes us class him with the earlier philosophers. It was characteristic of these latter that they assumed rather naïvely that man can look upon the world and can know it, and can by thinking about it succeed in giving a reasonable account of it. That there may be a difference between the world as it really is and the world as it appears to man, and that it may be impossible for man to attain to a

knowledge of the absolute truth of things, does not seem to have occurred to them.

The fifth century before Christ was, in Greece, a time of intense intellectual ferment. One is reminded, in reading of it, of the splendid years of the Renaissance in Italy, of the awakening of the human mind to a vigorous life which cast off the bonds of tradition and insisted upon the right of free and unfettered development. Athens was the center of this intellectual activity.

In this century arose the Sophists, public teachers who busied themselves with all departments of human knowledge, but seemed to lay no little emphasis upon certain questions that touched very nearly the life of man. Can man attain to truth at all — to a truth that is more than a mere truth *to him*, a *seeming* truth? Whence do the laws derive their authority? Is there such a thing as justice, as right? It was with such questions as these that the Sophists occupied themselves, and such questions as these have held the attention of mankind ever since. When they make their appearance in the life of a people or of an individual man, it means that there has been a rebirth, a birth into the life of reflection.

When Socrates, that greatest of teachers, felt called upon to refute the arguments of these men, he met them, so to speak, on their own ground, recognizing that the subjects of which they discoursed were, indeed, matter for scientific investigation. His attitude seemed to many conservative persons in his day a dangerous one; he was regarded as an innovator; he taught men to think and to raise questions where, before, the traditions of the fathers had seemed a sufficient guide to men's actions.

And, indeed, he could not do otherwise. Men had learned to reflect, and there had come into existence at least the beginnings of what we now sometimes rather loosely call the mental and moral sciences. In the works of Socrates' disciple Plato (428–347 B.C.) and in those of Plato's disciple Aristotle (384–