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FROM ARISTOTLE TO PLOTINUS



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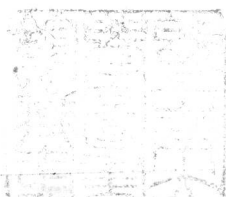
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This book, together with
FROM THALES TO PLATO (Phoenix Book P 8),
is also available in a one-volume, clothbound edition from

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, CHICAGO 60637
The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London

© 1934, 1956 by The University of Chicago. All rights reserved. Published 1934. Second Edition 1956. First Phoenix Edition 1956. Eighth Impression 1973. Printed in the United States of America

International Standard Book Number: 0-226-76479-6
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 56-4949

PHILOSOPHIC OVERTONES

A PHILOSOPHER'S FAITH

That we shall be better and braver and less helpless if we think that we ought to enquire, than we should have been if we indulged in the idle fancy that there was no knowing and no use in seeking to know what we do not know;—that is a theme upon which I am ready to fight, in word and deed, to the utmost of my power.—PLATO.

A PHILOSOPHER'S CAUTION

It is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits; it is evidently equally foolish to accept probable reasoning from a mathematician and to demand from a rhetorician scientific proofs.—ARISTOTLE.

A PHILOSOPHER'S PRAYER

Beloved Pan, and all ye other gods who haunt this place, give me beauty in the inward soul; and may the outward and inward man be at one. May I reckon the wise to be the wealthy, and may I have such a quantity of gold as a temperate man and he only can bear and carry.—SOCRATES.

A PHILOSOPHER'S ADVICE

Absorb not all that you wish, but all that you can hold. Only be of sound mind, and then you will be able to hold all that you wish. For the more the mind receives, the more does it expand.

“What then?” you say, “do we not know certain men who have sat for many years at the feet of a philosopher and yet have not acquired the slightest tinge of wisdom?” Of course I know such men. There are indeed persevering gentlemen who stick at it; I do not call them pupils of the wise, but merely “squatters.” . . . This class, as you will see, con-

stitutes a large part of the listeners,—who regard the philosopher's lecture-room merely as a sort of lounging-place for their leisure. They do not set about to lay aside any faults there, or to receive a rule of life, by which they may test their characters; they merely wish to enjoy to the full the delights of the ear. . . . But the true hearer is ravished and stirred by the beauty of the subject matter, not by the jingle of empty words. When a bold word has been uttered in defiance of death, or a saucy fling in defiance of Fortune, we take delight in acting straightway upon that which we have heard. Men are impressed by such words, and become what they are bidden to be. . . . It is easy to rouse a listener so that he will crave righteousness; for Nature has laid the foundations and planted the seeds of virtue in us all.—SENECA.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TO PERSONS

To colleagues, Charles W. Morris, Charles Hartshorne, Charner M. Perry, and Clifford P. Osborne—thanks, all. To the latter two special acknowledgments: to Professor Perry for proofreading, an onerous job done at home at a difficult time while I dreamed in modern Athens of the scenes and thoughts which this book commemorates, and to Dr. Osborne for critical aid on the introductions throughout, particularly on Aristotle; for translating into English the intricate turns of Gorgias' skepticism as reported by Sextus Empiricus; and for aid on the proof.

TO PUBLISHERS

To Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Company and Charles Scribner's Sons, respectively, the English and the American publishers of Fairbanks' *The First Philosophers of Greece*, from which all selections from the pre-Socratics are taken, save as otherwise indicated. To the latter, also, for the material on Democritus. To the Open Court Publishing Company for A. E. Taylor's translation of the first book of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. To the Macmillan Company for Welldon's translation of Aristotle's *Ethics*, and the few excerpts, indicated in the text, from the Davies and Vaughan translation of Plato's *Republic*.

But most of all to Professor Edward Capps, the American editor of the "Loeb Classical Library" series, from which the majority of my selections are taken. Acknowledgment is made in each several case and at the proper place. But neither that nor this can begin to indicate my debt to this magnificent library. The editor has not only done the handsome thing, which exact justice would not have required, of

letting me use a large body of material without charge, but has made it possible in this way for me to call attention in fashion exemplary to the greatest storehouse in English of classic wisdom from Greece and Rome. Every student who uses this book will, I hope, treasure for present and later use the knowledge of where he can get more, much more, of such mellow reflection as he has here sampled from this ever growing Loeb series.

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A PANORAMA

In our earlier volume, *From Thales to Plato*, we came a long way: from Greek animism and superstition to Platonic sophistication. But there is a journey yet before us, an expanse to be negotiated between speculation and knowledge, between theory and practice. In this volume we are to see the major insights of Plato corrected, consolidated, and turned to imperial account in the governance of men.

The Romans were Greeks in cultural aspiration, but they were moderns in converting know-*why* into know-*how*. Aristotle is the key figure between the old speculative bent of Plato and the new practicalism of Rome.

In seeking, like Plato, the good life for men, Aristotle appropriated a distinction which Plato had thought invidious. The Stagirite had discerned that what we have come to call "the pursuit of happiness" must normally be the happiness of *pursuit*; for men are active animals, even before they are social animals and long before they are rational. But there is an activity of the vegetable, an activity of the animal, and then an activity which is above osmosis and more than locomotion. This is contemplation; and it is peculiarly human, representing man at his highest and best. Such an eventuation is Plato still alive in his reluctant student; but man is both vegetable and animal and so partakes of their forms of activity. By stretching the concept of "activity" and rendering all forms of it respectable, Aristotle made it possible for the Romans to remain cultural Greeks without changing their categories.

Man can, then, be rational in following rules which he has not made, and this is honorable. He can be rational in making rules to be followed, and this is honorable. He can be rational in discerning the reasonableness of rules which he follows or makes, and this is honorable—and spiritual as well.

2 PHILOSOPHERS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

To make reason to run like a thread through the whole of man's activity is to give integrity to culture and continuity to integrity. So to see is to achieve a preview of Aristotle's emendation of classic Greek theory and his contribution to the Roman, indeed to the Christian, way.

CHAPTER I

ARISTOTLE

HIS SYNTHESIS IN ITS HISTORICAL SETTING

ARISTOTLE ON HIS PREDECESSORS (*Metaphysics*)

After a childhood in the atmosphere of the court of the King of Macedon, where his father was physician; after some twenty years as a student and special worker in Plato's Academy at Athens; after being tutor to Alexander the Great—after enough experience to have made a complete life for an ordinary man, Aristotle (384–322) settled down to his vocation in Athens at the head of his own school, the Lyceum. He directed what we should call research and wrote voluminously. Estimates of his output range from four hundred to one thousand manuscripts. What he published during his lifetime was literary dialogues after the manner of Plato. What we have as his work is lecture notes and plans for, and results of, his teaching. He inherited Plato's major problem of the changing versus the changeless, which problem he saw to be still unsolved. Upon it he brought to bear all speculation down to his time. The changeable yields, as with Plato, only opinion; knowledge requires unchanging objects. But Plato's statement of the continuity between the two (i.e., the doctrine of ideas) Aristotle believed to widen rather than to close the gap between the two realms. His criticisms of this doctrine are classic. A theory of development became his own positive reliance. This theory he not only proclaimed, as we shall see in his doctrine of the potential becoming actual through form, but he also illustrated it by showing, as we are at once to see, how his philosophy grew out of and actualized the doctrines of his predecessors. Moreover, his study of the constitutions of Greek city-states, especially the one of Athens, now available, is genuinely genetic in tone. The formal outline of Aristotle's lifework comprises three main kinds of science—theoretical, practical,

and poetical. The first is subdivided into physics, mathematics, and first philosophy (metaphysics) or theology. The second falls under two headings, politics and ethics, although for Aristotle ethics is really a subdivision of politics. The third includes the useful and the fine arts. Underlying all of these sciences is logic, which may be defined as a scientific methodology prerequisite to the study of any of the special sciences.

. . .

ARISTOTLE ON HIS PREDECESSORS

Being the first book of the *Metaphysics* (A. E. Taylor's trans.). With permission from and acknowledgments to the Open Court Publishing Company, Chicago.

I. All mankind have an instinctive desire of knowledge. This is illustrated by our enjoyment of our sense-perceptions. Even apart from their utility they are enjoyed for their own sake, and above all the others the perceptions of the eye. For we prize sight, speaking roughly, above everything else, not merely as a guide to action, but even when we are not contemplating any action. The reason of this is that of all the senses sight gives us most information and reveals many specific qualities. Now, all animals, when they come into the world, are provided by nature with sensation, but in some of them memory does not result from their sensations, while in others it does. Hence the latter are both more intelligent and more able to learn than those which are incapable of memory. Creatures like the bee, and any other similar species which there may be, which cannot hear sounds, are intelligent without the power to learn; those which, in addition to memory, possess this sense *learn*.

Now, all the animals live by the guidance of their presentations and memories, but only partake to a trifling degree of *experience*, but the human species lives also by the guidance of rules of art and reflective inferences. In man memory gives rise to *experience*, since repeated memories of the same thing acquire the character of a single experience. [Experience, in fact, seems to be very similar to science and art.] And science and art in man are a product of experience. For "experience has created art," as Polus correctly remarks, "but inexperience chance." Art comes into being when many observations of experience give rise to a single universal con-

viction about a class of similar cases. Thus to be convinced that such and such a treatment was good for Callias when suffering from such and such an ailment, and again for Socrates, and similarly in each of many individual cases, is a result of *experience*, but the conviction that it was found beneficial to *all* persons of a specific constitution, whom we have placed together as a definite class, when suffering from a specific ailment—e.g., sufferers from catarrh, or bile, or fever—is an affair of *art*. Now, for purposes of practice experience is recognized to be not inferior to art; indeed, we observe that persons of experience are actually more successful than those who possess theory without experience. The reason of this is that experience is acquaintance with individual facts, but art with general rules, and all action and production is concerned with the individual. Thus the physician does not cure *man*, except in an accidental sense, but Callias or Socrates or some other individual person of whom it is an *accident* to be a man. Hence, if one possesses the theory without the experience, and is acquainted with the universal concept, but not with the individual fact contained under it, he will often go wrong in his treatment; for what has to be treated is the individual.

In spite of this, however, we ascribe *knowledge* and *understanding* to art rather than to *experience*, and regard artists as *wiser* than persons of mere experience, thus implying that *wisdom* is rather to be ascribed to men in all cases in proportion to their *knowledge*. This is because the former class know the *reason* for the thing; the latter not. Persons of mere experience know the *that*, but not the *why*; the others recognize the *why* and the reason. Hence, too, in every department master workmen are held in higher esteem and thought to know more and to be wiser than manual workers, because they know the reasons for what is done, while manual workers, it is held, are like some inanimate things which produce a result (e.g., fire *burns*), but produce it without any knowledge of it. Thus we estimate superiority in wisdom not by skill in practice, but by the possession of theory and the comprehension of reasons. In general, too, it is an indication of wisdom to be able to teach others, and on this ground, also, we regard art as more truly knowledge than experience; the artist can teach, the man of mere experience cannot. Again, we hold that none of our sense-perceptions is wisdom, though it is they which give us the most assured knowledge of indi-

vidual facts. Still, they do not tell us the *reason why* about anything; e.g., they do not tell us *why* fire is hot, but merely the fact *that* it is hot. Hence it was natural that in the earliest times the inventor of any art which goes beyond the common sense-perceptions of mankind should be universally admired, not merely for any utility to be found in his inventions, but for the wisdom by which he was distinguished from other men. But when a variety of arts had been invented, some of them being concerned with the necessities and others with the social refinements of life, the inventors of the latter were naturally always considered wiser than those of the former because their knowledge was not directed to immediate utility. Hence when everything of these kinds had been already provided, those sciences were discovered which deal neither with the necessities nor with the enjoyments of life, and this took place earliest in regions where men had leisure. This is why the mathematical arts were first put together in Egypt, for in that country the priestly caste were indulged with leisure.¹ (The difference between art and science and the other kindred concepts has been explained in our course on Ethics; the purpose of the present observations is simply to show that it is universally agreed that the object of what is called *wisdom* is first causes and principles.) So, as we have already said, the possessor of experience is recognized as wiser than the possessor of any form of sense-perception, the artist as wiser than the mere possessor of experience, the master craftsman than the manual worker, the speculative sciences than the productive. Thus it is manifest that wisdom is a form of science which is concerned with some kind of causes and principles.

II. Since we are in quest of this science, we have to ask what kind of causes and principles are treated of by the science which is wisdom? Well, the matter will perhaps become clearer if we enumerate the convictions which we currently hold about the wise man. Well, we currently hold, first, that the wise man, so far as possible, knows everything, but without possessing scientific knowledge of the individual details. Secondly, that he is one who is capable of apprehending difficult things and matters which it is not easy for man to apprehend; (for sense-perception is the common possession of all,

¹ Contrast the more historical remark of Herodotus, that Egyptian geometry arose from the necessity of resurveying the land after the periodical inundations of the Nile.

and hence easy, and is nothing wise). Again, that in every science he who is more exact and more competent to teach is the wiser man. Also that, among the various sciences, that which is pursued for its own sake and with a view to knowledge has a better claim to be considered wisdom than that which is pursued for its applications, and the more commanding science a better claim than the subsidiary. For the wise man, it is held, has not to be directed by others, but to direct them; it is not for him to take instructions from another, but for those who are less wise to take them from him.

Here, then, is an enumeration of our current convictions about wisdom and the wise. Now, of these marks that of *universality* of knowledge necessarily belongs to him whose knowledge has the highest generality, for in a sense he knows all that is subsumed under it. These most universal truths are also in general those which it is *hardest* for men to recognize, since they are most remote from sense-perception. And the most *exact* of the sciences are those which are most directly concerned with ultimate truths. For the sciences which depend on fewer principles are more exact than those in which additional assumptions are made; e.g., Arithmetic than Geometry. And, again, that science is more competent *to teach* which is more concerned with speculation on the causes of things, for in every case he who states the causes of a thing teaches. And knowledge and science *for their own sake* are found most of all in the science of that which is in the highest sense the object of knowledge. For he who chooses science for its own sake will give the highest preference to the highest science, and this is the science of that which is in the highest sense the object of knowledge. But the highest objects of knowledge are the ultimates and causes. For it is through them and as consequences of them that other truths are apprehended, not they through what is subordinate to them. And the most commanding among the sciences, more truly commanding than the subsidiary sciences, is that which apprehends the end for which each act must be done; this end is, in each individual case, the corresponding *good*, and universally the *highest good* in the universe. All these considerations indicate that the title in question is appropriate to one and the same science. For this science must be one which contemplates ultimate principles and causes; for the good or end is itself one type of cause. That it is not a *productive* science is clear, even from consideration of the earliest philosophies.

For men were first led to study philosophy, as indeed they are to-day, by *wonder*.² At first they felt wonder about the more superficial problems; afterward they advanced gradually by perplexing themselves over greater difficulties; e.g., the behavior of the moon, the phenomena of the sun [and stars], and the origination of the universe. Now, he who is perplexed and wonders believes himself to be ignorant. (Hence even the lover of myths is, in a sense, a philosopher, for a myth is a tissue of wonders.) Thus if they took to philosophy to escape ignorance, it is patent that they were pursuing science for the sake of knowledge itself, and not for any utilitarian applications. This is confirmed by the course of the historical development itself. For nearly all the requisites both of comfort and social refinement had been secured before the quest for this form of enlightenment began. So it is clear that we do not seek it for the sake of any ulterior application. Just as we call a man *free* who exists for his own ends, and not for those of another, so it is with this, which is the only *liberal* science; it alone of the sciences exists for its own sake.

Hence there would be justice in regarding the enjoyment of it as superhuman. For human nature is in many respects unfree. So, in the words of Simonides, "this meed belongs to God alone; for man, 'tis meet" to seek a science conformable to his estate. Indeed, if there is anything in what the poets say, and Deity is of an envious temper, it would be most natural that it should be shown here, and that all the preeminently gifted should be unlucky. But Deity cannot by any possibility be envious; rather, as the proverb has it, "Many are the lies of the bards," nor is it right to prize any other knowledge more highly than this. For the divinest of sciences is to be prized most highly; and this is the only science which deserves that name, for two reasons. For that science is divine which it would be most fitting for God to possess, and also that science, if there is one, which deals with divine things. And this is the only science which has both these attributes. For it is universally admitted that God is a cause and a first principle;³ and, again, God

² An allusion to Plato, *Theaetetus*, 155d: "This emotion of wonder is very proper to a philosopher; for there is no other starting-point for philosophy."

³ Hence Aristotle's own name for what his commentators called "metaphysics" is indifferently "first Philosophy" or "Theology." His doctrine of God as the supreme efficient cause is more particularly contained in book Λ (12) of the present work.