

THE  
FIVE GREAT PHILOSOPHIES  
OF LIFE

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New York  
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1921

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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

WHEN asked why some men with moderate talents and meagre technical equipment succeed, where others with greater ability and better preparation fail; why some women with plain features and few accomplishments charm, while others with all the advantages of beauty and cultivation repel, we are wont to conceal our ignorance behind the vague term *personality*. Undoubtedly the deeper springs of personality are below the threshold of consciousness, in hereditary traits and early training. Still some of the higher elements of personality rise above this threshold, are reducible to philosophical principles, and amenable to rational control.

The five centuries from the birth of Socrates to the death of Jesus produced five such principles: the Epicurean pursuit of pleasure, genial but ungenerous; the Stoic law of self-control, strenuous but forbidding; the Platonic plan of subordination, sublime but ascetic; the Aristotelian sense of proportion, practical but uninspiring; and the

Christian Spirit of Love, broadest and deepest of them all.

The purpose of this book is to let the masters of these sane and wholesome principles of personality talk to us in their own words; with just enough of comment and interpretation to bring us to their points of view, and make us welcome their friendly assistance in the philosophical guidance of life.

Why a new edition under a new title? Because "From Epicurus to Christ" had an antiquarian flavor; while the book presents those answers to the problem of life, which, though offered first by the ancients, are still so broad, deep, and true that all our modern answers are mere varieties of these five great types. Because the former title suggested that the historical aspect was a finality; whereas it is here used merely as the most effective approach to present-day solutions of the fundamental problems of life.

"Why rewrite the last chapter?" Because, while the faith of the world has found in Jesus much more than a philosophy of life, in its quest for greater things it has almost overlooked that. Yet Jesus' Spirit of Love is the final philosophy of life.

To the question in its Jewish form, "What is

the great commandment?" Jesus answers, "The first is Love to God; and the second, just like it, Love to man." Translated into modern, ethical terms his philosophy of life is a grateful and helpful appreciation; first of the whole system of relations, physical, mental, social, and spiritual, as Personal like ourselves, but Infinite, seeking perfection, caring for each lowliest member as an essential and precious part of the whole; and, second, of other finite and imperfect persons, whose aims, interests, and affections are just as real, and therefore to be held just as sacred, as our own.

To love, to dwell in this grateful and helpful appreciation of the Father and our brothers, — this is life: and all that falls short of it is intellectually the illusion of selfishness; spiritually the death penalty of sin.

From this central point of view every phase of Jesus' teaching, his democracy, compassion, courage, humility, earnestness, charitableness, sacrifice, can be shown to flow straight and clear.

Of course such a limitation to his philosophy of life leaves out of account all supernatural and eschatological considerations. We here consider only the truth and worth of the teaching; not who the Teacher is, nor what may happen to us hereafter if we obey or disobey.

Yet even from this limited point of view we may get a glimpse, more real and convincing than any to be gained by the traditional, dogmatic approach, of the divine and eternal quality of both Teacher and teaching — we may see that beyond Love truth cannot go; above Love life cannot rise; that he who loves is one with God; that out of Love all is hell, whether here or hereafter; and that in Love lies heaven, both now and forevermore.

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BOWDOIN COLLEGE,  
BRUNSWICK, MAINE,  
July 25, 1911.

# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER I

### THE EPICUREAN PURSUIT OF PLEASURE

	PAGE
I. Selections from the Epicurean Scriptures . . .	I
II. The Epicurean View of Work and Play . . .	20
III. The Epicurean Price of Happiness . . .	29
IV. The Defects of Epicureanism . . .	36
V. An Example of Epicurean Character . . .	46
VI. The Confessions of an Epicurean Heretic . . .	53

## CHAPTER II

### STOIC SELF-CONTROL BY LAW

I. The Psychological Law of Apperception . . .	66
II. Selections from the Stoic Scriptures . . .	71
III. The Stoic Reverence for Universal Law . . .	82
IV. The Stoic Solution of the Problem of Evil . . .	87
V. The Stoic Paradoxes . . .	90
VI. The Religious Aspect of Stoicism . . .	95
VII. The Permanent Value of Stoicism . . .	101
VIII. The Defects of Stoicism . . .	106

## CHAPTER III

### THE PLATONIC SUBORDINATION OF LOWER TO HIGHER

I. The Nature of Virtue . . .	110
II. Righteousness writ Large . . .	116

	PAGE
III. The Cardinal Virtues . . . . .	123
IV. Plato's Scheme of Education . . . . .	131
V. Righteousness the Comprehensive Virtue . . . . .	138
VI. The Stages of Degeneration . . . . .	143
VII. The Intrinsic Superiority of Righteousness . . . . .	153
VIII. Truth and Error in Platonism . . . . .	159

## CHAPTER IV

## THE ARISTOTELIAN SENSE OF PROPORTION

I. Aristotle's Objections to Previous Systems . . . . .	169
II. The Social Nature of Man . . . . .	176
III. Right and Wrong determined by the End . . . . .	179
IV. The Need of Instruments . . . . .	191
V. The Happy Mean . . . . .	194
VI. The Aristotelian Virtues and their Acquisition . . . . .	199
VII. Aristotelian Friendship . . . . .	209
VIII. Criticism and Summary of Aristotle's Teaching . . . . .	212

## CHAPTER V

## THE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT OF LOVE

I. The Teaching of Love . . . . .	215
II. The Fulfilment of Law through Love . . . . .	219
III. The Counterfeits of Love . . . . .	239
IV. The Whole-heartedness of Love . . . . .	247
V. The Cultivation of Love . . . . .	257
VI. The Blessedness of Love . . . . .	264
VII. The Supremacy of Love . . . . .	277
INDEX . . . . .	293

# THE FIVE GREAT PHILOSOPHIES OF LIFE

## CHAPTER I

### THE EPICUREAN PURSUIT OF PLEASURE

#### I

#### SELECTIONS FROM THE EPICUREAN SCRIPTURES

EPICUREANISM is so simple a philosophy of life that it scarcely needs interpretation. In fact, as the following citations show, it was originally little more than a set of directions for living "the simple life," with pleasure as the simplifying principle. The more subtle teaching of the other philosophies will require to be introduced by explanatory statement, or else accompanied by a running commentary as it proceeds. The best way to understand Epicureanism, however, is to let Epicurus and his disciples speak for themselves. Accordingly, as in religious services the sermon is preceded by reading of the Scriptures and singing of hymns, we will open our study of the Epicurean philosophy of life by selections from their scriptures and hymns. First the master, though unfortu-



nately he is not so good a master of style as many of his disciples, shall speak. The gist of Epicurus's teaching is contained in the following passages.

*Epicurus's teaching*  
*End of action: free from pain & fear*  
 (24) "The end of all our actions is to be free from pain and fear; and when once we have attained this, all the tempest of the soul is laid, seeing that the living creature has not to go to find something that is wanting, or to seek something else by which the good of the soul and of the body will be fulfilled." "Wherefore we call pleasure the alpha and omega of a blessed life. Pleasure is our first and kindred good. From it is the commencement of every choice and every aversion, and to it we come back, and make feeling the rule by which to judge of every good thing." "When we say, then, that pleasure is the end and aim, we do not mean the pleasures of the prodigal, or the pleasures of sensuality, as we are understood by some who are either ignorant and prejudiced for other views, or inclined to misinterpret our statements. By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and trouble in the soul. It is not an unbroken succession of drinking feasts and of revelry, not the enjoyments of the fish and other delicacies of a splendid table, which produce a pleasant life: it is sober reasoning, searching out the reasons for

*③ Pleasure is the first good*  
*③ In meaning of pleasure:*

every choice and avoidance, and banishing those beliefs through which great tumults take possession of the soul." "Nothing is so productive of cheerfulness as to abstain from meddling, and not to engage in difficult undertakings, nor force yourself to do something beyond your power. For all this involves your nature in tumults." "The main part of happiness is the disposition which is under our own control. Service in the field is hard work, and others hold command. Public speaking abounds in heart-throbs and in anxiety whether you can <sup>21 22 23</sup>carry conviction. Why then pursue an object like this, which is at the disposal of others?" "Wealth beyond the requirements of nature is no more benefit to men than water to a vessel which is full. Both alike overflow. We can look upon another's goods without perturbation and can enjoy purer pleasure than they, for we are free from their arduous struggle."

"Thou must also keep in mind that of desires *the desires* some are natural, and some are groundless; and *being natural* that of the natural some are necessary as well as *and groundless* natural, and some are natural only. And of the necessary desires, some are necessary if we are to be happy, and some if the body is to remain unperturbed, and some if we are even to live. By the clear and certain understanding of these things

we learn to make every preference and aversion, so that the body may have health and the soul tranquillity, seeing that this is the sum and end of a blessed life." "Cheerful poverty is an honourable thing." "Great wealth is but poverty when matched with the law of nature." "If any one thinks his own not to be most ample, he may become lord of the whole world, and will yet be wretched." "Fortune but slightly crosses the wise man's path." "If thou wilt make a man happy, add not unto his riches, but take away from his desires."

*Pleasure not always good but pain sometimes containing pleasure*

"And since pleasure is our first and native good, for that reason we do not choose every pleasure whatsoever, but oftentimes pass over many pleasures when a greater annoyance ensues from them. And oftentimes we consider pains superior to pleasures, and submit to the pain for a long time, when it is attended for us with a greater pleasure. All pleasure, therefore, because of its kinship with our nature, is a good, but it is not in all cases our choice, even as every pain is an evil, though pain is not always, and in every case, to be shunned."

"It is, however, by measuring one against another, and by looking at the conveniences and inconveniences, that all these things must be judged. Sometimes we treat the good as an evil,

and the evil, on the contrary, as a good ; and we regard independence of outward goods as a great good, not so as in all cases to use little, but so as to be contented with little, if we have not much, being thoroughly persuaded that they have the sweetest enjoyment of luxury who stand least in need of it, and that whatever is natural is easily procured, and only the vain and worthless hard to win. Plain fare gives as much pleasure as a costly diet, when once the pain due to want is removed ; and bread and water confer the highest pleasure when they are brought to hungry lips. To habituate self, therefore, to plain and inexpensive diet gives all that is needed for health, and enables a man to meet the necessary requirements of life without shrinking, and it places us in a better frame when we approach at intervals a costly fare, and renders us fearless of fortune."

"Riches according to nature are of limited extent, and can be easily procured ; but the wealth craved after by vain fancies knows neither end nor limit. He who has understood the limits of life knows how easy it is to get all that takes away the pain of want, and all that is required to make our life perfect at every point. In this way he has no need of anything which involves a contest." "The beginning and the greatest good is prudence."

*Prudence is  
the greatest  
good*

Wherefore prudence is a more precious thing even than philosophy: from it grow all the other virtues, for it teaches that we cannot lead a life of pleasure which is not also a life of prudence, honour, and justice; nor lead a life of prudence, honour, and justice, which is not also a life of pleasure. For the virtues have grown into one with a pleasant life, and a pleasant life is inseparable from them."

"Of all the things which wisdom procures for the happiness of life as a whole, by far the greatest is the acquisition of friendship."

*Acquisition of friendship* "We ought to look round for people to eat and drink with, before we look for something to eat and drink: to feed without a friend is the life of a lion and a wolf." "Do everything as if Epicurus had his eye upon you. Retire into yourself chiefly at that time when you are compelled to be in a crowd." "We ought to select some good man and keep him ever before our eyes, so that we may, as it were, live under his eye, and do everything in his sight." "No one loves another except for his own interest." "Among the other ills which attend folly is this: it is always beginning to live." "A foolish life is restless and disagreeable: it is wholly engrossed with the future." "We are born once: twice we cannot be born,

*Egoistic ideas*

and for everlasting we must be non-existent. But thou, who art not master of the morrow, puttest off the right time. Procrastination is the ruin of life for all; and, therefore, each of us is hurried and unprepared at death." "Learn betimes to die, or if it please thee better to pass over to the gods." "He who is least in need of the morrow will meet the morrow most pleasantly." "Injustice is not in itself a bad thing: but only in the fear, arising from anxiety on the part of the wrong-doer, that he will not escape punishment." "A wise man will not enter political life unless something extraordinary should occur." "The free man will take his free laugh over those who are fain to be reckoned in the list with Lycurgus and Solon."

"The first duty of salvation is to preserve our vigour and to guard against the defiling of our life in consequence of maddening desires." "Accustom thyself in the belief that death is nothing to us, for good and evil are only where they are felt, and death is the absence of all feeling: therefore a right understanding that death is nothing to us makes enjoyable the mortality of life, not by adding to years an illimitable time, but by taking away the yearning after immortality. For in life there can be nothing to fear, to him who has thoroughly appre-

Death is  
nothing

hended that there is nothing to cause fear in what time we are not alive. Foolish, therefore, is the man who says that he fears death, not because it will pain when it comes, but because it pains in the prospect. Whatsoever causes no annoyance when it is present causes only a groundless pain by the expectation thereof. [Death, therefore, the most awful of evils, is nothing to us, seeing that when we are, death is not yet, and when death comes, then we are not. It is nothing then, either to the living or the dead, for it is not found with the living, and the dead exist no longer.”]

These words of the master, given with no attempt to reconcile their apparent inconsistencies, convey very fairly the substance of his teaching, including both its excellences and its deep defects. The exalted esteem in which his doctrines were held, leading his disciples to commit them to memory as sacred and verbally inspired; the personal reverence for his character; and the extravagant expectations as to what his philosophy was to do for the world, together with a glimpse into the Epicurean idea of heaven, are well illustrated by the following sentences at the opening of the third book of Lucretius, addressed to Epicurus:—

“Thee, who first wast able amid such thick darkness to raise on high so bright a beacon and

his idea of  
heaven

shed a light on the true interests of life, thee I follow, glory of the Greek race, and plant now my footsteps firmly fixed in thy imprinted marks, not so much from a desire to rival thee as that from the love I bear thee I yearn to imitate thee. Thou, father, art discoverer of things, thou furnishest us with fatherly precepts, and like as bees sip of all things in the flowery lawns, we, O glorious being, in like manner, feed from out thy pages upon all the golden maxims, golden I say, most worthy ever of endless life. For soon as thy philosophy issuing from a godlike intellect has begun with loud voice to proclaim the nature of things, the terrors of the mind are dispelled, the walls of the world part asunder, I see things in operation throughout the whole void : the divinity of the gods is revealed, and their tranquil abodes which neither winds do shake, nor clouds drench with rains nor snow congealed by sharp frost harms with hoary fall : an ever cloudless ether o'ercanopies them, and they laugh with light shed largely round. Nature too supplies all their wants, and nothing ever impairs their peace of mind."

Horace is so saturated with Epicureanism that it is hard to select any one of his odes as more expressive of it than another. His ode on the "Philosophy of Life" perhaps presents it in as



short compass as any. He asks what he shall pray for? Not crops, and ivory, and gold gained by laborious and risky enterprise; but healthy, solid contentment with the simple, universal pleasures near at hand.

“Why to Apollo’s shrine repair  
New hallowed? Why present with prayer  
Libation? Not those crops to gain,  
Which fill Sardinia’s teeming plain,

“Herds from Calabria’s sunny fields,  
Nor ivory that India yields,  
Nor gold, nor tracts where Liris glides  
So noiseless down its drowsy sides.

“Blest owners of Calenian vines,  
Crop them; ye merchants, drain the wines,  
That cargoes brought from Syria buy,  
In cups of gold. For ye, who try

“The broad Atlantic thrice a year  
And never drown, must sure be dear  
To gods in heaven. Me — small my need —  
Light mallows, olives, chiccory, feed.

“Give me then health, Apollo; give  
Sound mind; on gotten goods to live  
Contented; and let song engage  
An honoured, not a base, old age.”

For a lesson from the new Epicurean testament  
we cannot do better than turn to the sensible  
pages of Herbert Spencer’s “Data of Ethics.”

“The pursuit of individual happiness within those