

PLATO

THE MAN AND
HIS WORK

By the same author
*

THE ELEMENTS OF METAPHYSICS
PLATO: TIM^{EUS} AND CRITIAS

(a translation)

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PLATO

THE MAN AND
HIS WORK

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TO

ALL TRUE LOVERS OF PLATO, QUICK AND DEAD,

AND IN PARTICULAR TO

PROFESSOR CONSTANTIN RITTER

Vagliami il lungo studio e 7 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 con-
versations 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

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neither Crete'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.

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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 Tubingen, 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. Rittnr 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 Verhdlnis von Mathematik und Ideenlehre bei

Plato, in Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Mathematik I. i.

(Berlin, 1929.)

ROBIN, L. Greek Thought and the Origins of the Scientific Spirit.

(E. Tr. from the revised edition of the author's La Pense'e

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.)

NOVOTNY, 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 Pense'e Grecque. (Paris,

1934)

A. E. TAYLOR.

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THE following abbreviations have occasionally been used
:

E.G.Ph* = BURNET, Early Greek Philosophy (yd edition),
1920.

E.R.E. = HASTINGS, Encyclopaedia of Religion and
Ethics,

1908-1921.

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

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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, \. 1-4 ; (6) Diogenes Laertius, iii. i (critical edition, Basle, 1907) ; (c) Olympiodorus (Platonis Opera, ed. Hermann, vi. 190-195). The least bad of these is (6), which appears

to have been originally composed for a lady amateur of Platonic philosophy (XoTrXaruw W COL StKa/wj virapxov<ry , 47), not before the latter part of the first century of our era. The one or two references to the scholar Favorinus of Aries 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.

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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 Ppyrilampes, 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. Ppyrilampes 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 step-father, a prominent figure of the Periclean regime. 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, 1580, and for Demus, Gorgias, 48 id 5, Aristophanes, Wasps, 98. According to Ep. xiii. 3610,

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.).

THE LIFE OF PLATO 8

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 Cratylus² 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.⁸ 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 *tyffios* or "adolescent," a period of life currently reckoned as beginning at eighteen and

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