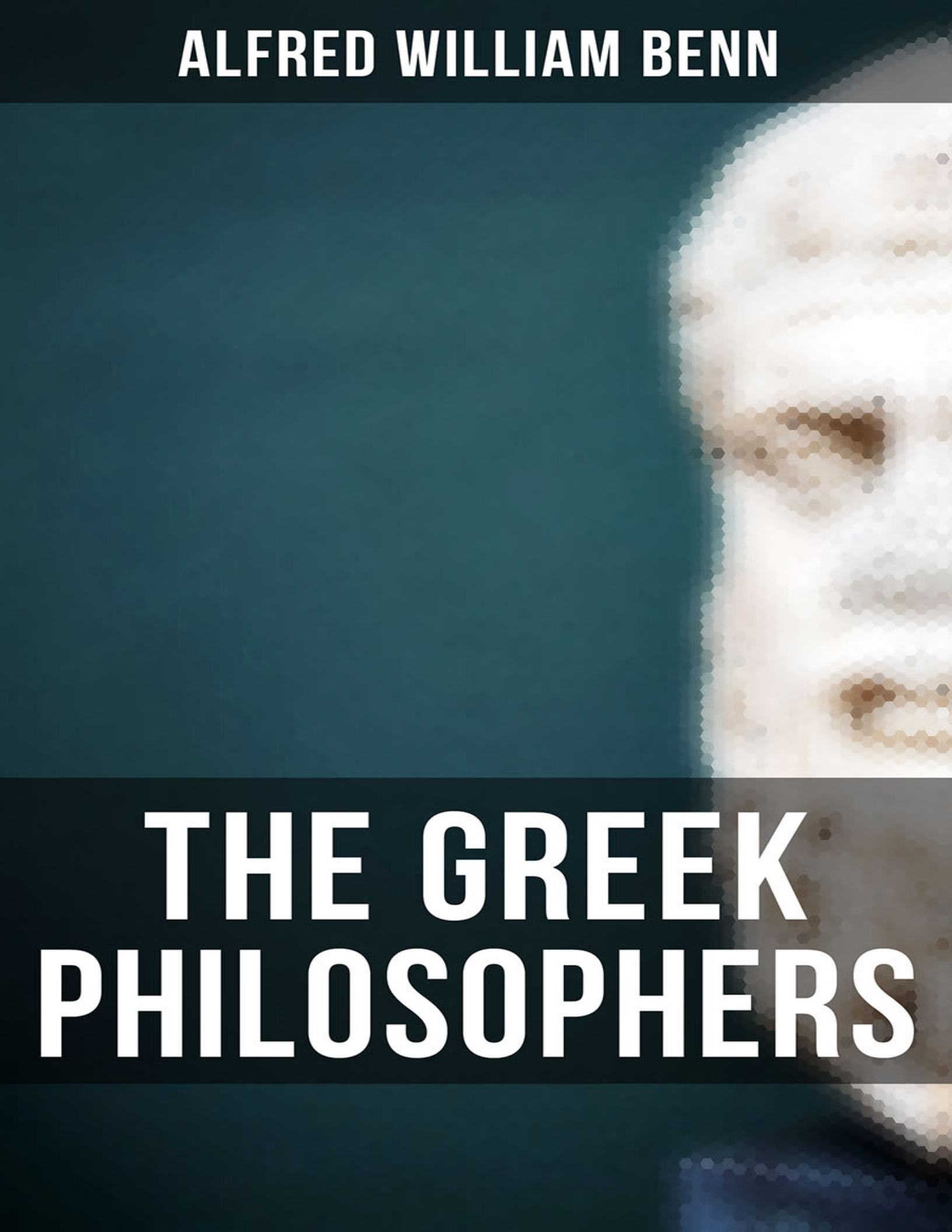
ALFRED WILLIAM BENN



THE GREEK PHILOSOPHERS

Alfred William Benn

The Greek Philosophers

Complete Edition

MUSAICUM
Books

OK Publishing, 2020
musaicumbooks@okpublishing.info

EAN 4064066397166

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Volume 1

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CHAPTER I.
EARLY GREEK THOUGHT.

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I.

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During the two centuries that ended with the close of the Peloponnesian war, a single race, weak numerically, and weakened still further by political disunion, simultaneously developed all the highest human faculties to an extent possibly rivalled but certainly not surpassed by the collective efforts of that vastly greater population which now wields the accumulated resources of modern Europe. This race, while maintaining a precarious foothold on the shores of the Mediterranean by repeated prodigies of courage and genius, contributed a new element to civilisation which has been the mainspring of all subsequent progress, but which, as it expanded into wider circles and encountered an increasing resistance from without, unavoidably lost some of the enormous elasticity that characterised its earliest and most concentrated reaction. It was the just boast of the Greek that to Asiatic refinement and Thracian valour he joined a disinterested thirst for knowledge unshared by his neighbours on either side.[5] And if a contemporary of Pericles could have foreseen all that would be thought, and said, and done during the next twenty-three centuries of this world’s existence, at no period during that long lapse of ages, not even among the kindred Italian race, could he

have found a competitor to contest with Hellas the olive crown of a nobler Olympia, the guerdon due to a unique combination of supreme excellence in every variety of intellectual exercise, in strategy, diplomacy, statesmanship; in mathematical science, architecture, plastic art, and poetry; in the severe fidelity of the historian whose paramount object is to relate facts as they have occurred, and the dexterous windings of the advocate whose interest leads him to evade or to disguise them; in the far-reaching meditations of the lonely thinker grappling with the enigmas of his own soul, and the fervid eloquence by which a multitude on whose decision hang great issues is inspired, directed, or controlled. He would not, it is true, have found any single Greek to pit against the athletes of the Renaissance; there were none who displayed that universal genius so characteristic of the greatest Tuscan artists such as Lionardo and Michael Angelo; nor, to take a much narrower range, did a single Greek writer whose compositions have come down to us excel, or even attempt to excel, in poetry and prose alike. But our imaginary prophet might have observed that such versatility better befitted a sophist like Hippias or an adventurer like Critias than an earnest master of the Pheidian type. He might have quoted Pindar’s sarcasm about highly educated persons who have an infinity of tastes and bring none of them to perfection;[6] holding, as Plato did in the next generation, that one man can only do one thing well, he might have added that the heroes of modern art would have done much nobler work had they concentrated their powers on a single task

instead of attempting half a dozen and leaving most of them incomplete.

This careful restriction of individual effort to a single province involved no dispersion or incoherence in the results achieved. The highest workers were all animated by a common spirit. Each represented some one aspect of the glory and greatness participated in by all. Nor was the collective consciousness, the uniting sympathy, limited to a single sphere. It rose, by a graduated series, from the city community, through the Dorian or Ionian stock with which they claimed more immediate kinship, to the Panhellenic race, the whole of humanity, and the divine fatherhood of Zeus, until it rested in that all-embracing nature which Pindar knew as the one mother of gods and men.[7]

We may, perhaps, find some suggestion of this combined distinctness and comprehensiveness in the aspect and configuration of Greece itself; in its manifold varieties of soil, and climate, and scenery, and productions; in the exquisite clearness with which the features of its landscape are defined; and the admirable development of coast-line by which all parts of its territory, while preserving their political independence, were brought into safe and speedy communication with one another. The industrial and commercial habits of the people, necessitating a well-marked division of labour and a regulated distribution of commodities, gave a further impulse in the same direction.

But what afforded the most valuable education in this sense was their system of free government, involving, as it did, the supremacy of an impersonal law, the subdivision of public authority among a number of magistrates, and the

assignment to each of certain carefully defined functions which he was forbidden to exceed; together with the living interest felt by each citizen in the welfare of the whole state, and that conception of it as a whole composed of various parts, which is impossible where all the public powers are collected in a single hand.

A people so endowed were the natural creators of philosophy. There came a time when the harmonious universality of the Hellenic genius sought for its counterpart and completion in a theory of the external world. And there came a time, also, when the decay of political interests left a large fund of intellectual energy, accustomed to work under certain conditions, with the desire to realise those conditions in an ideal sphere. Such is the most general significance we can attach to that memorable series of speculations on the nature of things which, beginning in Ionia, was carried by the Greek colonists to Italy and Sicily, whence, after receiving important additions and modifications, the stream of thought flowed back into the old country, where it was directed into an entirely new channel by the practical genius of Athens. Thales and his successors down to Democritus were not exactly what we should call philosophers, in any sense of the word that would include a Locke or a Hume, and exclude a Boyle or a Black; for their speculations never went beyond the confines of the material universe; they did not even suspect the existence of those ethical and dialectical problems which long constituted the sole object of philosophical discussion, and have continued since the time when they were first mooted to be regarded as its most peculiar province. Nor

yet can we look on them altogether or chiefly as men of science, for their paramount purpose was to gather up the whole of knowledge under a single principle; and they sought to realise this purpose, not by observation and experiment, but by the power of thought alone. It would, perhaps, be truest to say that from their point of view philosophy and science were still undifferentiated, and that knowledge as a universal synthesis was not yet divorced from special investigations into particular orders of phenomena. Here, as elsewhere, advancing reason tends to reunite studies which have been provisionally separated, and we must look to our own contemporaries—to our Tyndalls and Thomsons, our Helmholtzes and Zöllners—as furnishing the fittest parallel to Anaximander and Empedocles, Leucippus and Diogenes of Apollonia.

It has been the fashion in certain quarters to look down on these early thinkers—to depreciate the value of their speculations because they were thinkers, because, as we have already noticed, they reached their most important conclusions by thinking, the means of truly scientific observation not being within their reach. Nevertheless, they performed services to humanity comparable for value with the legislation of Solon and Cleisthenes, or the victories of Marathon and Salamis; while their creative imagination was not inferior to that of the great lyric and dramatic poets, the great architects and sculptors, whose contemporaries they were. They first taught men to distinguish between the realities of nature and the illusions of sense; they discovered or divined the indestructibility of matter and its atomic constitution; they taught that space is infinite, a conception

so far from being self-evident that it transcended the capacity of Aristotle to grasp; they held that the seemingly eternal universe was brought into its present form by the operation of mechanical forces which will also effect its dissolution; confronted by the seeming permanence and solidity of our planet, with the innumerable varieties of life to be found on its surface, they declared that all things had arisen by differentiation[8] from a homogeneous attenuated vapour; while one of them went so far as to surmise that man is descended from an aquatic animal. But higher still than these fragmentary glimpses and anticipations of a theory which still awaits confirmation from experience, we must place their central doctrine, that the universe is a cosmos, an ordered whole governed by number and law, not a blind conflict of semi-conscious agents, or a theatre for the arbitrary interference of partial, jealous, and vindictive gods; that its changes are determined, if at all, by an immanent unchanging reason; and that those celestial luminaries which had drawn to themselves in every age the unquestioning worship of all mankind were, in truth, nothing more than fiery masses of inanimate matter. Thus, even if the early Greek thinkers were not scientific, they first made science possible by substituting for a theory of the universe which is its direct negation, one that methodised observation has increasingly tended to confirm. The garland of poetic praise woven by Lucretius for his adored master should have been dedicated to them, and to them alone. His noble enthusiasm was really inspired by their lessons, not by the wearisome trifling of a moralist who knew little and

cared less about those studies in which the whole soul of his Roman disciple was absorbed.

When the power and value of these primitive speculations can no longer be denied, their originality is sometimes questioned by the systematic detractors of everything Hellenic. Thales and the rest, we are told, simply borrowed their theories without acknowledgment from a storehouse of Oriental wisdom on which the Greeks are supposed to have drawn as freely as Coleridge drew on German philosophy. Sometimes each system is affiliated to one of the great Asiatic religions; sometimes they are all traced back to the schools of Hindostan. It is natural that no two critics should agree, when the rival explanations are based on nothing stronger than superficial analogies and accidental coincidences. Dr. Zeller in his wonderfully learned, clear, and sagacious work on Greek philosophy, has carefully sifted some of the hypotheses referred to, and shown how destitute they are of internal or external evidence, and how utterly they fail to account for the facts. The oldest and best authorities, Plato and Aristotle, knew nothing about such a derivation of Greek thought from Eastern sources. Isocrates does, indeed, mention that Pythagoras borrowed his philosophy from Egypt, but Isocrates did not even pretend to be a truthful narrator. No Greek of the early period except those regularly domiciled in Susa seems to have been acquainted with any language but his own. Few travelled very far into Asia, and of those few, only one or two were philosophers. Democritus, who visited more foreign countries than any man of his time, speaks only of having discussed mathematical problems with the

wise men whom he encountered; and even in mathematics he was at least their equal.[9] It was precisely at the greatest distance from Asia, in Italy and Sicily, that the systems arose which seem to have most analogy with Asiatic modes of thought. Can we suppose that the traders of those times were in any way qualified to transport the speculations of Confucius and the Vedas to such a distance from their native homes? With far better reason might one expect a German merchant to carry a knowledge of Kant's philosophy from Königsberg to Canton. But a more convincing argument than any is to show that Greek philosophy in its historical evolution exhibits a perfectly natural and spontaneous progress from simpler to more complex forms, and that system grew out of system by a strictly logical process of extension, analysis, and combination. This is what, chiefly under the guidance of Zeller, we shall now attempt to do.

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Thales, of Miletus, an Ionian geometrician and astronomer, about whose age considerable uncertainty prevails, but who seems to have flourished towards the close of the seventh century before our era, is by general consent regarded as the father of Greek physical philosophy. Others before him had attempted to account for the world’s origin, but none like him had traced it back to a purely natural beginning. According to Thales all things have come from water. That the earth is entirely enclosed by water above and below as well as all round was perhaps a common notion among the Western Asiatics. It was certainly believed by the Hebrews, as we learn from the accounts of the creation and the flood contained in Genesis. The Milesian thinker showed his originality by generalising still further and declaring that not only did water surround all things, but that all things were derived from it as their first cause and substance, that water was, so to speak, the material absolute. Never have more pregnant words been spoken; they acted like a ferment on the Greek mind; they were the grain whence grew a tree that has overshadowed the whole earth. At one stroke they substituted a comparatively scientific, because a verifiable principle for the confused fancies of mythologising poets. Not that Thales was an atheist, or an agnostic, or anything of that sort. On the contrary, he is reported to have said that all things were full of gods; and the report sounds credible enough. Most probably the saying was a protest

against the popular limitation of divine agencies to certain special occasions and favoured localities. A true thinker seeks above all for consistency and continuity. He will more readily accept a perpetual stream of creative energy than a series of arbitrary and isolated interferences with the course of Nature. For the rest, Thales made no attempt to explain how water came to be transformed into other substances, nor is it likely that the necessity of such an explanation had ever occurred to him. We may suspect that he and others after him were not capable of distinguishing very clearly between such notions as space, time, cause, substance, and limit. It is almost as difficult for us to enter into the thoughts of these primitive philosophers as it would have been for them to comprehend processes of reasoning already familiar to Plato and Aristotle. Possibly the forms under which we arrange our conceptions may become equally obsolete at a more advanced stage of intellectual evolution, and our sharp distinctions may prove to be not less artificial than the confused identifications which they have superseded.

The next great forward step in speculation was taken by Anaximander, another Milesian, also of distinguished attainments in mathematics and astronomy. We have seen that to Thales water, the all-embracing element, became, as such, the first cause of all things, the absolute principle of existence. His successor adopted the same general point of view, but looked out from it with a more penetrating gaze. Beyond water lay something else which he called the Infinite. He did not mean the empty abstraction which has stalked about in modern times under that ill-omened name,

nor yet did he mean infinite space, but something richer and more concrete than either; a storehouse of materials whence the waste of existence could be perpetually made good. The growth and decay of individual forms involve a ceaseless drain on Nature, and the deficiency must be supplied by a corresponding influx from without.[A] For, be it observed that, although the Greek thinkers were at this period well aware that nothing can come from nothing, they had not yet grasped the complementary truth inalienably wedded to it by Lucretius in one immortal couplet, that nothing can return to nothing; and Kant is quite mistaken when he treats the two as historically inseparable. Common experience forces the one on our attention much sooner than the other. Our incomings are very strictly measured out and accounted for without difficulty, while it is hard to tell what becomes of all our expenditure, physical and economical. Yet, although the indestructibility of matter was a conception which had not yet dawned on Anaximander, he seems to have been feeling his way towards the recognition of a circulatory movement pervading all Nature. Everything, he says, must at last be reabsorbed in the Infinite as a punishment for the sin of its separate existence.[10] Some may find in this sentiment a note of Oriental mysticism. Rather does its very sadness illustrate the healthy vitality of Greek feeling, to which absorption seemed like the punishment of a crime against the absolute, and not, as to so many Asiatics, the crown and consummation of spiritual perfection. Be this as it may, a doctrine which identified the death of the whole world with its reabsorption into a higher

reality would soon suggest the idea that its component parts vanish only to reappear in new combinations.

Anaximander's system was succeeded by a number of others which cannot be arranged according to any order of linear progression. Such arrangements are, indeed, false in principle. Intellectual life, like every other life, is a product of manifold conditions, and their varied combinations are certain to issue in a corresponding multiplicity of effects. Anaximenes, a fellow-townsman of Anaximander, followed most closely in the footsteps of the master. Attempting, as it would appear, to mediate between his two predecessors, he chose air for a primal element. Air is more omnipresent than water, which, as well as earth, is enclosed within its plastic sphere. On the other hand, it is more tangible and concrete than the Infinite, or may even be substituted for that conception by supposing it to extend as far as thought can reach. As before, cosmogony grows out of cosmography; the enclosing element is the parent of those embraced within it.

Speculation now leaves its Asiatic cradle and travels with the Greek colonists to new homes in Italy and Sicily, where new modes of thought were fostered by a new environment. A name, round which mythical accretions have gathered so thickly that the original nucleus of fact almost defies definition, first claims our attention. Aristotle, as is well known, avoids mentioning Pythagoras, and always speaks of the Pythagoreans when he is discussing the opinions held by a certain Italian school. Their doctrine, whoever originated it, was that all things are made out of number. Brandis regards Pythagoreanism as an entirely original effort of speculation, standing apart from the main current

of Hellenic thought, and to be studied without reference to Ionian philosophy. Zeller, with more plausibility, treats it as an outgrowth of Anaximander's system. In that system the finite and the infinite remained opposed to one another as unreconciled moments of thought. Number, according to the Greek arithmeticians, was a synthesis of the two, and therefore superior to either. To a Pythagorean the finite and the infinite were only one among several antithetical couples, such as odd and even, light and darkness, male and female, and, above all, the one and the many whence every number after unity is formed. The tendency to search for antitheses everywhere, and to manufacture them where they do not exist, became ere long an actual disease of the Greek mind. A Thucydides could no more have dispensed with this cumbrous mechanism than a rope-dancer could get on without his balancing pole; and many a schoolboy has been sorely puzzled by the fantastic contortions which Italiote reflection imposed for a time on Athenian oratory.

Returning to our more immediate subject, we must observe that the Pythagoreans did not maintain, in anticipation of modern quantitative science, that all things are determined by number, but that all things are numbers, or are made out of numbers, two propositions not easily distinguished by unpractised thinkers. Numbers, in a word, were to them precisely what water had been to Thales, what air was to Anaximenes, the absolute principle of existence; only with them the idea of a limit, the leading inspiration of Greek thought, had reached a higher degree of abstraction. Number was, as it were, the exterior limit of the finite, and the interior limit of the infinite. Add to this that

mathematical studies, cultivated in Egypt and Phoenicia for their practical utility alone, were being pursued in Hellas with ever-increasing ardour for the sake of their own delightfulness, for the intellectual discipline that they supplied—a discipline even more valuable then than now, and for the insight which they bestowed, or were believed to bestow, into the secret constitution of Nature; and that the more complicated arithmetical operations were habitually conducted with the aid of geometrical diagrams, thus suggesting the possibility of applying a similar treatment to every order of relations. Consider the lively emotions excited among an intelligent people at a time when multiplication and division, squaring and cubing, the rule of three, the construction and equivalence of figures, with all their manifold applications to industry, commerce, fine art, and tactics, were just as strange and wonderful as electrical phenomena are to us; consider also the magical influence still commonly attributed to particular numbers, and the intense eagerness to obtain exact numerical statements, even when they are of no practical value, exhibited by all who are thrown back on primitive ways of living, as, for example, in Alpine travelling, or on board an Atlantic steamer, and we shall cease to wonder that a mere form of thought, a lifeless abstraction, should once have been regarded as the solution of every problem, the cause of all existence; or that these speculations were more than once revived in after ages, and perished only with Greek philosophy itself.

We have not here to examine the scientific achievements of Pythagoras and his school; they belong to the history of

science, not to that of pure thought, and therefore lie outside the present discussion. Something, however, must be said of Pythagoreanism as a scheme of moral, religious, and social reform. Alone among the pre-Socratic systems, it undertook to furnish a rule of conduct as well as a theory of being. Yet, as Zeller has pointed out,[11] it was only an apparent anomaly, for the ethical teaching of the Pythagoreans was not based on their physical theories, except in so far as a deep reverence for law and order was common to both. Perhaps, also, the separation of soul and body, with the ascription of a higher dignity to the former, which was a distinctive tenet of the school, may be paralleled with the position given to number as a kind of spiritual power creating and controlling the world of sense. So also political power was to be entrusted to an aristocracy trained in every noble accomplishment, and fitted for exercising authority over others by self-discipline, by mutual fidelity, and by habitual obedience to a rule of right. Nevertheless, we must look, with Zeller, for the true source of Pythagoreanism as a moral movement in that great wave of religious enthusiasm which swept over Hellas during the sixth century before Christ, intimately associated with the importation of Apollo-worship from Lycia, with the concentration of spiritual authority in the oracular shrine of Delphi, and the political predominance of the Dorian race, those Normans of the ancient world. Legend has thrown this connexion into a poetical form by making Pythagoras the son of Apollo; and the Samian sage, although himself an Ionian, chose the Dorian cities of Southern Italy as a favourable field for his new teaching, just as Calvinism

found a readier acceptance in the advanced posts of the Teutonic race than among the people whence its founder sprang. Perhaps the nearest parallel, although on a far more extensive scale, for the religious movement of which we are speaking, is the spectacle offered by mediaeval Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries of our era, when a series of great Popes had concentrated all spiritual power in their own hands, and were sending forth army after army of Crusaders to the East; when all Western Europe had awakened to the consciousness of its common Christianity, and each individual was thrilled by a sense of the tremendous alternatives committed to his choice; when the Dominican and Franciscan orders were founded; when Gothic architecture and Florentine painting arose; when the Troubadours and Minnesängers were pouring out their notes of scornful or tender passion, and the love of the sexes had become a sentiment as lofty and enduring as the devotion of friend to friend had been in Greece of old. The bloom of Greek religious enthusiasm was more exquisite and evanescent than that of feudal Catholicism; inferior in pure spirituality and of more restricted significance as a factor in the evolution of humanity, it at least remained free from the ecclesiastical tyranny, the murderous fanaticism, and the unlovely superstitions of mediaeval faith. But polytheism under any form was fatally incapable of coping with the new spirit of enquiry awakened by philosophy, and the old myths, with their naturalistic crudities, could not long satisfy the reason and conscience of thinkers who had learned in another school to seek everywhere for a central unity of

control, and to bow their imaginations before the passionless perfection of eternal law.

III.

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Such a thinker was Xenophanes, of Colophon. Driven, like Pythagoras, from his native city by civil discords, he spent the greater part of an unusually protracted life wandering through the Greek colonies of Sicily and Southern Italy, and reciting his own verses, not always, as it would appear, to a very attentive audience. Elea, an Italiote city, seems to have been his favourite resort, and the school of philosophy which he founded there has immortalised the name of this otherwise obscure Phocaean settlement. Enough remains of his verses to show with what terrible strength of sarcasm he assailed the popular religion of Hellas. 'Homer and Hesiod,' he exclaims, 'have attributed to the gods everything that is a shame and reproach among men—theft, adultery, and mutual deception.'[12] Nor is Xenophanes content with attacking these unedifying stories, he strikes at the anthropomorphic conceptions which lay at their root. 'Mortals think that the gods have senses, and a voice and a body like their own. The negroes fancy that their deities are black-skinned and snub-nosed, the Thracians give theirs fair hair and blue eyes; if horses or lions had hands and could paint, they too would make gods in their own image.'[13] It was, he declared, as impious to believe in the birth of a god as to believe in the possibility of his death. The current polytheism was equally false. 'There is one Supreme God among gods and men, unlike mortals both in mind and body.'[14] There can be only one God, for God is Omnipotent,

so that there must be none to dispute his will. He must also be perfectly homogeneous, shaped like a sphere, seeing, hearing, and thinking with every part alike, never moving from place to place, but governing all things by an effortless exercise of thought. Had such daring heresies been promulgated in democratic Athens, their author would probably have soon found himself and his works handed over to the tender mercies of the Eleven. Happily at Elea, and in most other Greek states, the gods were left to take care of themselves.

Xenophanes does not seem to have been ever molested on account of his religious opinions. He complains bitterly enough that people preferred fiction to philosophy, that uneducated athletes engrossed far too much popular admiration, that he, Xenophanes, was not sufficiently appreciated;[B] but of theological intolerance, so far as our information goes, he says not one single word. It will easily be conceived that the rapid progress of Greek speculation was singularly favoured by such unbounded freedom of thought and speech. The views just set forth have often been regarded as a step towards spiritualistic monotheism, and so, considered in the light of subsequent developments, they unquestionably were. Still, looking at the matter from another aspect, we may say that Xenophanes, when he shattered the idols of popular religion, was returning to the past rather than anticipating the future; feeling his way back to the deeper, more primordial faith of the old Aryan race, or even of that still older stock whence Aryan and Turanian alike diverged. He turns from the brilliant, passionate, fickle Dyaus, to Zên, or Ten, the ever-present, all-seeing, all-

embracing, immovable vault of heaven. Aristotle, with a sympathetic insight unfortunately too rare in his criticisms on earlier systems, observes that Xenophanes did not make it clear whether the absolute unity he taught was material or ideal, but simply looked up at the whole heaven and declared that the One was God.[15] Aristotle was himself the real creator of philosophic monotheism, just because the idea of living, self-conscious personality had a greater value, a profounder meaning for him than for any other thinker of antiquity, one may almost say than for any other thinker whatever. It is, therefore, a noteworthy circumstance that, while warmly acknowledging the anticipations of Anaxagoras, he nowhere speaks of Xenophanes as a predecessor in the same line of enquiry. The latter might be called a pantheist were it not that pantheism belongs to a much later stage of speculation, one, in fact, not reached by the Greek mind at any period of its development. His leading conception was obscured by a confusion of mythological with purely physical ideas, and could only bear full fruit when the religious element had been entirely eliminated from its composition. This elimination was accomplished by a far greater thinker, one who combined poetic inspiration with philosophic depth; who was penetrating enough to discern the logical consequences involved in a fundamental principle of thought, and bold enough to push them to their legitimate conclusions without caring for the shock to sense and common opinion that his merciless dialectic might inflict.

Parmenides, of Elea, flourished towards the beginning of the fifth century B.C. We know very little about his personal

history. According to Plato, he visited Athens late in life, and there made the acquaintance of Socrates, at that time a very young man. But an unsupported statement of Plato's must always be received with extreme caution; and this particular story is probably not less fictitious than the dialogue which it serves to introduce. Parmenides embodied his theory of the world in a poem, the most important passages of which have been preserved. They show that, while continuing the physical studies of his predecessors, he proceeded on an entirely different method. Their object was to deduce every variety of natural phenomena from a fundamental unity of substance. He declared that all variety and change were a delusion, and that nothing existed but one indivisible, unalterable, absolute reality; just as Descartes' antithesis of thought and extension disappeared in the infinite substance of Spinoza, or as the Kantian dualism of object and subject was eliminated in Hegel's absolute idealism. Again, Parmenides does not dogmatise to the same extent as his predecessors; he attempts to demonstrate his theory by the inevitable necessities of being and thought. Existence, he tells us over and over again, *is*, and non-existence is not, cannot even be imagined or thought of as existing, for thought is the same as being. This is not an anticipation of Hegel's identification of being with thought; it only amounts to the very innocent proposition that a thought is something and about something—enters, therefore, into the general undiscriminated mass of being. He next proceeds to prove that what is can neither come into being nor pass out of it again. It cannot come out of the non-existent, for that is

inconceivable; nor out of the existent, for nothing exists but being itself; and the same argument proves that it cannot cease to exist. Here we find the indestructibility of matter, a truth which Anaximander had not yet grasped, virtually affirmed for the first time in history. We find also that our philosopher is carried away by the enthusiasm of a new discovery, and covers more ground than he can defend in maintaining the permanence of all existence whatever. The reason is that to him, as to every other thinker of the pre-Socratic period, all existence was material, or, rather, all reality was confounded under one vague conception, of which visible resisting extension supplied the most familiar type. To proceed: Being cannot be divided from being, nor is it capable of condensation or expansion (as the Ionians had taught); there is nothing by which it can be separated or held apart; nor is it ever more or less existent, but all is full of being. Parmenides goes on in his grand style:—

> ‘Therefore the whole extends continuously,
> Being by Being set; immovable,
> Subject to the constraint of mighty laws;
> Both increate and indestructible,
> Since birth and death have wandered far away
> By true conviction into exile driven;
> The same, in self-same place, and by itself
> Abiding, doth abide most firmly fixed,
> And bounded round by strong Necessity.
> Wherefore a holy law forbids that Being
> Should be without an end, else want were there,
> And want of that would be a want of all.’[16]

Thus does the everlasting Greek love of order, definition, limitation, reassert its supremacy over the intelligence of this noble thinker, just as his almost mystical enthusiasm has reached its highest pitch of exaltation, giving him back a world which thought can measure, circumscribe, and control.

Being, then, is finite in extent, and, as a consequence of its absolute homogeneity, spherical in form. There is good reason for believing that the earth's true figure was first discovered in the fifth century B.C., but whether it was suggested by the *à priori* theories of Parmenides, or was generalised by him into a law of the whole universe, or whether there was more than an accidental connexion between the two hypotheses, we cannot tell. Aristotle, at any rate, was probably as much indebted to the Eleatic system as to contemporary astronomy for his theory of a finite spherical universe. It will easily be observed that the distinction between space and matter, so obvious to us, and even to Greek thinkers of a later date, had not yet dawned upon Parmenides. As applied to the former conception, most of his affirmations are perfectly correct, but his belief in the finiteness of Being can only be justified on the supposition that Being is identified with matter. For it must be clearly understood (and Zeller has the great merit of having proved this fact by incontrovertible arguments)[17] that the Eleatic Being was not a transcendental conception, nor an abstract unity, as Aristotle erroneously supposed, nor a Kantian noumenon, nor a spiritual essence of any kind, but a phenomenal reality of the most concrete description. We can only not call Parmenides a materialist, because

materialism implies a negation of spiritualism, which in his time had not yet come into existence. He tells us plainly that a man's thoughts result from the conformation of his body, and are determined by the preponderating element in its composition. Not much, however, can be made of this rudimentary essay in psychology, connected as it seems to be with an appendix to the teaching of our philosopher, in which he accepts the popular dualism, although still convinced of its falsity, and uses it, under protest, as an explanation of that very genesis which he had rejected as impossible.

As might be expected, the Parmenidean paradoxes provoked a considerable amount of contradiction and ridicule. The Reids and Beatties of that time drew sundry absurd consequences from the new doctrine, and offered them as a sufficient refutation of its truth. Zeno, a young friend and favourite of Parmenides, took up arms in his master's defence, and sought to prove with brilliant dialectical ability that consequences still more absurd might be deduced from the opposite belief. He originated a series of famous puzzles respecting the infinite divisibility of matter and the possibility of motion, subsequently employed as a disproof of all certainty by the Sophists and Sceptics, and occasionally made to serve as arguments on behalf of agnosticism by writers of our own time. Stated generally, they may be reduced to two. A whole composed of parts and divisible *ad infinitum* must be either infinitely great or infinitely little; infinitely great if its parts have magnitude, infinitely little if they have not. A moving body can never come to the end of a given line, for it must first