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978-0-521-09357-6 - Plato's Thought in the Making: A Study of the
Development of His Metaphysics

J. E. Raven

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PLATO'S THOUGHT IN THE MAKING

A STUDY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF
HIS METAPHYSICS

BY

J. E. RAVEN

*Fellow of King's College and Lecturer in Classics
in the University of Cambridge*



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To
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P R E F A C E

I have taken the opportunity afforded by a sabbatical year of writing this essay on the development of Plato's metaphysics, the subject of several courses of lectures or classes which I have given in Cambridge since 1950. The year happened to be the one in which Shakespeare's quatercentenary was being religiously celebrated throughout the world. My book is intended not only for undergraduates studying classics or philosophy but also for those who, like Shakespeare, have 'small Latin and less Greek': those who have largely forgotten the classics which they learnt laboriously at school; those who never read the originals but have enjoyed them in translation; those who have imbibed unconsciously, in their reading of English literature, the myths, the conceptions and the theories which ultimately sprang from ancient Greece and which, passing through diverse manifestations, interpretations and distortions, have inspired and moulded the politics, the arts and the ideals of Europe. In large measure the book is an anthology of Plato, together with the interpretations of some of his editors. The passages quoted represent, however, a personal selection and can only tell a fragmentary and incoherent story. So I have connected them with sections of commentary which vary in length and detail in proportion to the obscurity of the passage under discussion. I have neither striven to be original nor hesitated on occasions to be unorthodox or controversial. Part II in particular, which is the core of the book,

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contains a number of opinions that I have not read or heard elsewhere, and I might, from the specialist's point of view, have been wiser to confine my subject to three great dialogues written in Plato's middle life, the *Phaedo*, the *Symposium* and the *Republic*. Feeling, however, that the kind of reader I had in mind would like the main discussion put into its context, I decided at the outset to include Parts I and III as a purposely light frame for the picture in the centre, and later, almost as an afterthought but with the same motive, I added the Introduction.

The choice of title was difficult. The obvious solution, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, was denied me since Sir David Ross had already written a well-known book of that name. *The Development of Plato's Metaphysics*, which would have given an accurate impression, sounded too austere and was therefore relegated to the status of subtitle. The final choice is intended not to deter the layman but still to suggest that the book makes no claim to be in any way a complete study of Platonic philosophy. Some parts of the subject, especially the central books of the *Republic* and the late dialogues, are undeniably difficult. Chapter 10 for instance, in which I have attempted, among other things, a detailed interpretation of the problematic analogy of the Divided Line, is not designed as bedside reading, while in Part III, which is meant only to tie up loose ends rather than to introduce new and specialized material, I have been drastically selective and consciously unoriginal. My purpose throughout has been to concentrate attention on the middle dialogues, because they are the ones of the greatest potential interest to the

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non-specialist, and I have accordingly confined my treatment of all the other dialogues to themes elaborated in that group. Any reader who would welcome a more detailed exposition of a topic on which I have scarcely touched has a mass of other books to choose from, a scanty selection of which can be found in the short bibliography.

I have included very few Greek words in the text, almost always where modern authors whom I wished to quote had already done so. Some familiar transliterations, such as Logos or Eros, have been rather reluctantly adopted as less misleading than any translation. When the meaning of a single Greek word, phrase or clause is impossible to render accurately into English, I have tried to find the nearest approximation and appended the Greek in a footnote. Occasionally also footnotes are invoked to give the original of a sentence whose translation is crucial to the interpretation of a passage. Otherwise they are reduced to a minimum.

Anybody who writes anything about Plato, especially on the basis of accumulated lecture-notes in which he may not have acknowledged every borrowing, is likely to have incurred numerous debts and forgotten some of them. So many scholars, ancient and modern, Greek and barbarian, have published their views on every conceivable aspect of Plato's thought that no student could be expected to remember where and when he first assimilated any particular notion or attitude. All conscious debts of this kind are acknowledged in the text, but there may well be as many of which I am today unaware. One debt I shall

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never be able to assess. During my last two years as an undergraduate I attended every lecture that Cornford gave in Cambridge and still have notes of them. Those lectures, supplemented in the intervals by reading the dialogues, imbued me with an admiration and affection for Plato which I have never lost but am constantly trying to hand on to others. I cannot estimate how many lesser debts of the same sort I may have forgotten.

Several friends and relations helped me by reading the whole or parts of the original manuscript or the subsequent typescript, and nearly all of them made valuable suggestions. I am especially indebted to four of them, F. H. Sandbach, G. S. Kirk, R. W. David and George Rylands, for ungrudging assistance in their special fields. To the last of the four, who read both manuscript and typescript and expunged some at least of the stylistic blemishes, the final product is gratefully dedicated.

J. E. R.

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