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PLATO'S CONCEPTION OF PHILOSOPHY. By H. Gauss. London: Macmillan & Co., 1937. Pp. xxii + 265. 6s.

WHAT PLATO THINKS. By Gustav E. Mueller. LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing Co., 1937. Pp. vii + 128. \$1.60.

According to Cicero, the Platonists of the Middle Academy held that Plato propounded no doctrine. "Nihil affirmatur, et in utramque partem multa disseruntur, de omnibus quaeritur, nihil certi dicitur." The history of platonisms has run its course between that sceptical extreme and the affirmation, point by point, of almost every possible attitude and doctrine. It is testimony to the vitality of Plato's influence that that process continues even today. Dr. Gauss states as his purpose "to set forth those

teachings of his [*sc.*, Plato's] that are, as it seems, of a permanent value, that have influenced all subsequent thought, and that, lastly, may help even us in our own philosophical efforts." The source of his pronouncements is consequently not limited to the *Dialogues*, but embraces "the right kind of philosophy, or the *philosophia perennis*, as it is sometimes called" (to be set forth in a second volume, *The First Principles of Platonism*), derived from the tradition of Christian Platonism. Consequently when Dr. Gauss finds Plato doctrinally inconclusive or at fault, and that seems to be the case frequently, he can have recourse to those later Platonists, St. Paul, St. John, Plotinus, St. Thomas, the Cambridge Platonists, Dean Inge, or A. E. Taylor.

The first half of Dr. Gauss's book is devoted to a statement of what Platonism is not. To show that Platonism does not conform to any of the well-known types of philosophy, the four types of philosophy enumerated by Windelband as characteristic successively of Aristotle and his predecessors, the post-Aristotelian philosophers, the medieval philosophers, and Kant and his followers are examined in four successive chapters. Platonism is not a natural philosophy, nor concerned with a *summum bonum*, nor comparable with a medieval *Summa*, nor an anticipation of the critical philosophy. It is, according to the last three chapters, a mode of life rather than a body of results. That that mode of life is explained in terms of the character of the philosopher (he possesses no absolute knowledge) and the means which he disposes for convincing his audience is not without significance, since these considerations are somewhat more reminiscent of the tradition of ancient rhetoric than of any philosophic tradition.

Dr. Gauss has written a book of great moral earnestness and sentiment; it contains rightly little pretense to historical erudition and evinces none of the dialectical subtlety one might properly expect of a Platonist. Since Plato criticized the erroneous aspirations of natural philosophers, moralists, theologians, and epistemologists, his conception of philosophy differed, not in method or in doctrine, but in kind from that of his predecessors. But if Dr. Gauss is literal in his interpretation of the negative dialectic of Plato, he is even more painfully literal in his interpretation of the aims of those philosophers whom he sets against Platonism: it has become the fashion to refute Kant in the name of the *philosophia perennis*, but one would go far to find an interpretation of Kant more naïve than that which Dr. Gauss states and annihilates. Philosophy, or Platonism, is an art, the possession of only a few; the philosopher is devoted to truth, careless of any other end, and lives his life under a vow. Professor A. E. Taylor has written the introduction for Dr. Gauss's book.

Professor Mueller, like Dr. Gauss, is concerned with a living tradition.

In explanation of the title of his book, he says that Plato is treated in this work as a contemporary thinker: "he was present at our seminar, and we asked him questions which we assumed were his questions as well as our own." But Professor Mueller's approach has the benefit of a dialectical subtlety which prepares insights that are lacking in the romantic rhetoric of Dr. Gauss. Whereas he finds no system in Plato, he holds that Plato writes systematically and that "each major dialogue is the whole of Plato's philosophy developed in a particular focus of attention." That same insight leads him to look for "dialectical levels" in each of the Platonic concepts which he treats. Doctrines which in Dr. Gauss's approach would seem irrelevant to each other, or mutually exclusive, or simply false, are made to elucidate each other on successive stages of Professor Mueller's dialectic. It is interesting to observe that this interpretation is aided considerably by the author's sympathetic learning in the Kantian philosophy; but it is relevant to add that the dicta and devices of this "dialectical idealism," used in the interpretation of Plato, are for the most part justified by citation of the *Dialogues*, and that even non-Platonic doctrines, which are sometimes introduced, as in the chapter on "The Golden Mean," are stretched to meanings they never had and made to serve Platonic ends. Professor Mueller's Platonism may, perhaps, be described most accurately, as well as most flatteringly, as an attempt to use Plato in his book much as Plato uses his predecessors in the *Dialogues*.

RICHARD MCKEON

*University of Chicago*