

brief digest of the laws of criticism in poetry; but it is that species of criticism which assigns no other foundation for its judgments than authority, or the practice of the best writers. Aristotle in this fragment has not ascended to the source of criticism, which is to be found in the structure of the mind and nature of the passions. He describes with great precision the three different species of poetical comedy, tragedy, and epic * composition. He details the requisite ingredients of each species with respect to subject, as they are classed under the divisions of fable, sentiments, and manners; and he briefly lays down the rules for the structure and style of each species. But this code of laws rests upon the sole authority of the legislator, and not upon any solid basis of nature, or consonance to the universal feelings of mankind. The only reason given by Aristotle for their observance is, that Homer, Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and the best of the Greek poets, have observed them. This, no doubt, is a presumption of their rationality; and, at any rate, it is useful instruction in any art to know what has been the general practice of the best artists.

But the *Treatise on Rhetoric* is not a fragment, and must be more seriously considered. In that treatise, the author has given an elaborate analysis of the passions, and of the sources of pain and pleasure, happiness and unhappiness; as such an analysis affords the best instruction in the means of swaying the passions and persuading the judgment to the purposes of the orator, which it is the province of this science to teach. Here Aristotle has shown the most profound knowledge of human nature, and a genius truly philosophical—in investigating the most delicate modifications of the affections, and the power they have of balancing each other's influence; as he has strikingly evinced his own peculiar talent of generalization and scientific arrangement.

The style of Aristotle is a great contrast to that of Plato: the latter is eloquent, diffuse, and figurative; the former dry, sententious, and so compressed, that it requires often the most painful attention to follow his chain of reasoning, and in many instances even to discover his true meaning. This is particularly the case in his metaphysical writings. The obscurity prevalent in these parts of his works was remarked by ancient writers, and has given rise to numberless commentaries and explanations, totally different from each other. It has been supposed that on some difficult points of discussion, the philosopher studied to express himself

* On the subject of comedy, Aristotle has been extremely brief in his instructions. He has remarked, in general, that similar rules apply to a comic as to a serious subject, meaning that what he has said regarding the unities of time, place, and subject, and likewise the congruity of the sentiments and manners, have the same application in the one species of the drama as in the other. The *Poetics* of Aristotle, however, are evidently an imperfect work of which a considerable part has perished.

with obscurity: and hence Diogenes Laertius has compared himself to the cuttle-fish, which darkens the water around it to escape from danger. But Aristotle, wherever he is intelligible, discovers ample proof of a great, original, and comprehensive genius.

While Aristotle was employed in rearing the structure of the peripatetic philosophy, Pyrrho, his contemporary, was busy in combating the opinions of all the different sects of philosophers.* It was his notion that the only true wisdom consisted in doubting of every thing. Endowed with penetration enough to discover the insufficiency of many of the prevailing systems, and clearly perceiving the inadequacy of the human understanding to resolve the most important questions both in the sciences of matter and of mind, it was his desire to expose the futility of all the laborious exertions of his predecessors in the search of truth, and to find a philosophic tranquillity of spirit in the belief that all was doubt and uncertainty.

The Pyrrhonists, or skeptics, therefore, formed no systems: they amused themselves in attacking the weak parts of other schemes of philosophy, and they had nothing to defend of their own. They found great advantage in the sophistical mode of reasoning, which they could fairly employ against those who used it, and which they could successfully expose when used against themselves. It was not unnatural that the skeptics should conclude from the irreconcilable differences of opinion that prevailed among various sects of philosophers, that among so many opposite systems the greater part had taught error instead of truth; but it was a rash conclusion thence to infer that truth had no existence, or that certainty on any subject of philosophical speculation was altogether unattainable. The skeptic, or Pyrrhonist, involuntarily refuted his own opinions by his practice; for though he held, in theory, that there was no reality in moral distinctions, and that truth and falsehood, virtue and vice, beauty and deformity, had no real or essential difference, his actions and conduct in life were like those of other men, perpetually influenced and regulated by the belief of these essential differences. Thus the ridicule which he affected to throw upon other systems could be retorted with greater force upon his own; for that man is evidently less chargeable with absurdity who pursues a line of conduct which he believes to be right, than he who follows a line of conduct in absolute doubt whether it be right or wrong.

As the attainment of a perfect tranquillity of mind was the professed object of the Pyrrhonists, the opposite and rival sects of the Stoics and Epicureans proposed the same end in their systems of

* Pyrrho was a native of Elea, and born in the fourth century before Christ; he was a disciple of Anaxarchus, and accompanied that philosopher to India, in the expedition of Alexander the Great.

philosophy. We have seen that the course pursued by the skeptics was a very improper one to attain its end, since it is obvious that there can be no mental tranquillity where the reason and the feelings are in constant opposition. The Stoics cherished, if not a more certain, yet a far more consistent, and doubtless a more dignified system of sentiments and conduct. They strove to attain philosophic tranquillity by an absolute command and sovereignty over the passions, and a perfect indifference to all the accidents and calamities of life. The founder of this sect, which is among the most distinguished schools of philosophy, was Zeno the younger, a native of Cyprus, who flourished in the third century before Christ. He was a disciple of Crates the Cynic; and on that system of philosophy he founded his own, which may be considered as an offspring of the Cynical school. The Stoical doctrines have had a very extensive prevalence and duration; and though in some particulars palpably erroneous, may be accounted, on the whole, more consonant to right reason, and more favorable to the practice of virtue, than those of any other sect of the philosophy of the ancients.

According to the Stoics, the whole universe, and God himself, the creator and soul of that universe, are regulated by certain laws, which are immutable and resulting from necessity. The actions of God himself are regulated by those general laws; yet in one sense they may be considered as free and voluntary, viz.: that as there is nothing external of the universe which God pervades, and which his soul regulates, there is nothing external of himself which can impel or necessitate him. Man, according to the notions of the Stoics, is a part of the divinity. The human soul is a portion of that great soul which pervades the universe. The will of man is subject, like the divine will, to unalterable laws; yet it is virtually free, because man believes himself a free agent, and his conduct is influenced by that belief. He obeys voluntarily and from inclination that destiny which he must have obeyed *ab ante*, though he had not inclined it. Man being a part of the universe which is regulated by God, cannot complain that he is bound by the same laws which regulate and bind universal nature, and even God himself. The wise man, therefore, never considers what is good or evil with respect to himself. Whatever happened to him must necessarily have happened according to the order of nature; because had it not been necessary, it would not have happened. The pains and pleasures of an individual are, therefore, unworthy of the regard of him who attends to the universal good: his pains and pleasures are determined by the same law which determined his existence. He cannot repine that he exists, for at whom shall he repine? He existed by the necessity of nature. Virtue, in the opinion of a Stoic, was nothing more than a manly resolution to accommodate the unalterable laws of nature. Vice was a weak and dastardly endeavor to oppose

those laws. Vice therefore was folly, and virtue the only true wisdom.

But the virtue of the Stoics was not a principle of tranquil and passive acquiescence; it was a state of continual, active, and vigorous exertion. It was the duty of man to exercise the faculties of his mind in acquainting himself with the nature, the causes, and the relations of every part of that universe which he sees around him, that he may truly understand his own place in it, and the duties which he is destined and called on to fulfil. It is incumbent on man likewise to exercise his faculties in the discerning and distinguishing those things over which he has the power and control, and those which are beyond his power, and therefore ought not to be the objects of his care or his attention. All things whatever, according to the Stoics, fall under one or the other of these descriptions. To the class of things within our power belong our opinions, our desires, affections, endeavors, aversions, and, in a word, whatever may be termed our own works. To the class of things beyond our power belong the body of man, his goods or possessions, honors, dignities, offices, and generally what cannot be termed his own works. The former class of things are free, voluntary, and altogether at our command. The latter are in all respects the contrary; we cannot call them our own, nor in any shape control them. To the former, therefore, alone the wise man directs his care, and by a due attention to them his happiness is in his own power. The latter he despises, as incapable of affecting his real welfare, and in no degree obedient to his will.

As the Stoics believed the universe to be the work of an all-powerful, all-wise, and supremely beneficent Being, whose providence continually regulates the whole of that system of which every part is so combined as to produce the greatest possible sum of general good; so they regarded man as a principal instrument in the hand of God to accomplish that great purpose. The Creator, therefore, with transcendent wisdom, had so framed the moral constitution of man, that he finds his own chief happiness in promoting the welfare and happiness of his fellow creatures. "In the free consent of man to fulfil this end of his being, by accommodating his mind to the divine will, and thus endeavoring to discharge his part in society with cheerful zeal, with perfect integrity, with manly resolution, and with an entire resignation to the decrees of Providence, lies the sum and essence of his duty."

Very different from this was the philosophy of Epicurus, which, however, proposed to itself the same end—the attainment of a perfect tranquillity of mind. The term by which he marked the object of his philosophy, contributed much to increase the number of his disciples. "The supreme happiness of man," said Epicurus, "consists in *pleasure*. To this centre tend all his desires, and this, however disguised, is the real object of all his actions. The purpose of philosophy is to teach whatever best conduces

to the health of the body and of the mind; for where either is unsound or diseased, he can enjoy no true happiness or pleasure. As the health of the body is best secured by temperance, and the refraining from all hurtful gratifications of the senses, so the health of the mind is best promoted by the practice of virtue, and the exercise of the benevolent and social affections." Thus, the term pleasure, as explained by Epicurus, involves nothing unworthy of the pursuit of the good and virtuous. Epicurus himself is said to have been a man of worth and probity, and it is a certain fact that some of the most virtuous of the ancients were the professed disciples of his system. But that the principle of his philosophy is unsound, needs no other proof than this; that if *pleasure* is admitted to be man's chief object of pursuit, every man must be allowed to be the best judge of what constitutes his *pleasure*, and will determine, according to his own feelings, from what sources it is to be drawn. The practice of temperance might have been the pleasure of Epicurus; and we are told that it was so, and that his favorite diet, and what he usually presented to his guests, was bread and water. But it is the chief pleasure of others to be intemperate and voluptuous. It might have been the chief pleasure of Epicurus to be honest and just in his dealings, but others find pleasure in fraud and chicanery. In short, there is no vice or crime that might not find an apology, or rather a recommendation. Had it not afforded pleasure it would not have been practised or committed. "If it is allowable for me," we shall suppose the disciple of Epicurus to say to his master—"If it is allowable for me to pursue pleasure as my chief object, it is, of consequence, allowable for me to be vicious, if I find pleasure in it." "But you are punished," says Epicurus, "in the consequence; and you will find vice productive of pain instead of pleasure." "Of that," says the disciple, "I take my risk; I look to the consequence, and I find it overbalanced by my present gratification: I find pleasure in this action, notwithstanding the hazard of its consequence: it is therefore allowable for me to commit it." Epicurus must grant that the conclusion is fair and legitimate.

Equally erroneous with his system of morality, was Epicurus's system of nature. An infinite number of atoms existing from all eternity in an infinite space, and continually in motion, were the elements of that matter of which the universe is composed; but this universe, thus composed of atomical or indivisible parts, has subsisted in its present form from all eternity; and ever will subsist. It is, therefore, of necessary existence, and we have no need to resort to the power of a Creator to account for its origin, or to the wisdom of a Deity for its maintenance and government. But though the notion of a Deity did not enter into the system of Epicurus, to any active effect, he did not deny that the gods might exist. He professed even to teach that an order of eternal essences, clothed with a species of body, and endowed with senses

for the perception of pleasure, resided in some superior region of the universe, where they enjoyed a serene and infinitely happy existence, unalloyed by any knowledge or perception of the affairs of this material world, and undisturbed by any care or concern for its inhabitants. A religious creed, which, as Cicero well observes, is but a mask for absolute atheism, and which its author could have no other reason for propounding, than the servile fear of incurring danger from the open avowal of impiety.*

From the foregoing brief account of the different sects or schools of philosophy in Greece, I shall draw only two reflections: The one is, that with a very few exceptions, and more particularly that of the sect last mentioned, amidst all the errors incident to the mind unenlightened by revealed religion, the reason of mankind has, in all ages, looked up to a supreme, intelligent, and omnipotent Being—the Author of our existence—the Creator and the Governor of the universe: a belief which forces itself upon the most uncultivated understanding, and which the advancement of the intellectual powers tends always to strengthen and confirm. The other reflection is, that, from the great variety and opposition of those systems which we have enumerated of the Greek philosophers, we may perceive among that people a liberal spirit of toleration in matters of opinion, which stopped short at absolute irreligion and impiety; and a freedom of judgment in all matters of philosophical speculation, which did honor to their national character, and the genius of their legislative systems. If the Greek philosophers did not attain to truth, or to the perfection of science, they had, at least, the road open before them; and their errors may afford useful instruction to the moderns, by ascertaining the limits of the mental powers on matters of abstract speculation, by dispelling prejudices, simplifying the objects of investigation and discovery, and bringing the rational and candid inquirer nearer to the ends of his pursuit.

Cic. de Nat. Deor. lib. i. in fine.