

PSYCHOLOGY REVIVALS

**Theophrastus and the Greek
Physiological Psychology
Before Aristotle**

George Malcolm Stratton



Routledge Revivals

Theophrastus and the Greek Physiological Psychology Before Aristotle

First published in 1917, *Theophrastus and the Greek Physiological Psychology Before Aristotle* is on the history of ancient Greek physiological psychology. It includes the author's essays on Theophrastus and his writings on sense perception; the original Greek text and his own translation of *On the Senses*, which had not previously been translated in full into English. This book will be of interest to students of medicine, psychology and philosophy.



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THEOPHRASTUS *and the*
GREEK PHYSIOLOGICAL PSY-
CHOLOGY BEFORE ARISTOTLE
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PREFACE

STRANGE to say, there exists in English no complete translation of Theophrastus's small but exceedingly valuable writing *On the Senses*. And this must be my excuse for undertaking a work that could have been so much better done by many another hand. An understanding of Greek physiological psychology before Plato and after Aristotle requires that one know his Theophrastus; and having studied this fragment long myself, in the attempt to learn more of the history of psychology, it seemed but a neighbourly act to lighten, if one could, the labour of other psychologists until some abler help should come.

For while Theophrastus's account of the views of others is for the most part available in English, scattered here a sentence and there a paragraph through the works of men like Burnet and Beare, yet the canny judgments by Theophrastus himself, which in extent are nearly one-half of his *De Sensibus*, are usually either given in briefest summary or else omitted. And so one receives no feeling, which the connected whole would give, of the state of critical psychology in the later day. With the thought, then, that there will be readers interested in this later work and especially in Theophrastus's own psychology, and who will be unwilling to use him merely as a reporter of his predecessors, I have attempted to gather from the *De Sensibus* and his other writings the substance of his

Preface

own convictions regarding sense perception and the particular senses and in regard to pleasure and pain, and have offered this by way of introduction. It will I hope be found useful by those who wish—not an exhaustive account of the man's views of these subjects; for this I do not pretend to give—but something far fuller than is to be had in the well-known histories by Zeller, Chaignet, and Siebeck.

The Greek text of the *De Sensibus* used and here reproduced is substantially that of Diels in his *Doxographi Graeci*, with such changes as he himself has made in those portions of it included in his *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. Departures from the readings of Diels I have tried faithfully to indicate; but to a very few minor changes in punctuation I have thought it unnecessary to draw attention. Nor in the translation have I carried through in stubborn consistency my general purpose to indicate by angular brackets, < >, those English expressions that have no corresponding words in the Greek. I have omitted these marks when I felt that the occasion was very slight for troubling in this way the reader's eye.

To publications in English my indebtedness is greatest to Beare's *Greek Theories of Elementary Cognition from Alcmaeon to Aristotle*. No one who has not gone over this book almost line by line and word by word and compared it with the sources can sufficiently appreciate the scholarly care and expository judgment that have entered into it. In the pages following, from a sin that seems ever to beset the academic mind, my moments of dissent from his judgment will doubtless stand forth; but I should not wish these to obscure the larger agreement and admiration which I really feel.

In a more personal way I am under obligations to my colleagues in the University of California, Professor Clapp

Preface

and Professor Linforth of the Greek Department, who have read the translation of the *De Sensibus*, coming to my frequent relief with corrections and suggestions of importance, and helping me over many a troublesome place. The full degree of my debt to Professor A. E. Taylor of the University of St. Andrews it will be difficult for me to make the reader know. With extraordinary kindness and generosity, he also has examined this translation and many of the notes, and out of his own rich fund of Aristotelian knowledge has written me a running comment and criticism on the whole. The quotations from his manuscript, which he has permitted me to make, will give some imperfect idea of the character of his assistance; but in numberless ways, impossible to indicate, my own work has profited by his ample scholarship in this region of Greek learning. But since in some cases I have ventured to maintain what he would have otherwise, the reader must not hold him nor any but myself responsible for the errors which with all patience and endeavour doubtless still remain.

G. M. S.

BERKELEY, *March* 1917.



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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN CITATION

- A. and E. P.* : Aristotle and the Earlier Peripatetics ; being a translation from Zeller's ' Philosophy of the Greeks ', by Costelloe and Muirhead. London, 1897.
- A. E. T.* : Manuscript notes by Professor A. E. Taylor of the University of St. Andrews, Scotland.
- Beare* : Greek Theories of Elementary Cognition from Alcmaeon to Aristotle, by John I. Beare. Oxford, 1906.
- Burnet* : Early Greek Philosophy, by John Burnet. Second Edition, London, 1908.
- De Caus. Pl.* : Theophrasti de Causis Plantarum. (ΠΕΡΙ ΦΥΤΩΝ ΑΙΤΙΩΝ.)
- De Igne* : Theophrasti Libellus de Igne. (ΠΕΡΙ ΠΥΡΟΣ.)
- De Odor.* : Theophrasti Libellus de Odoribus. (ΠΕΡΙ ΟΣΜΩΝ.)
- De Sens.* : Theophrasti Fragmentum de Sensibus. (ΠΕΡΙ ΑΙΣΘΗΣΕΩΝ.)
- Dox.* : Doxographi Graeci : Collegit . . . Hermannus Diels. Berolini MDCCCLXXIX.
- Hist. Pl.* : Theophrasti Historia Plantarum. (ΠΕΡΙ ΦΥΤΩΝ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑΣ.)
- Ph. d. Gr.* : Die Philosophie der Griechen, von Eduard Zeller. Erster Theil, Fünfte Auflage, Leipzig, 1892.
- Philippson* : ΥΑΗ ΑΝΘΡΩΠΙΝΗ, scripsit et edidit Ludovicus Philippson. Berolini, 1831.
- Prantl* : Aristoteles über die Farben : Erläutert durch eine Uebersicht der Farbenlehre der Alten, von Dr. Carl Prantl. München, 1849.
- Prisc.* : Prisciani Lydi quae Extant : Metaphrasis in Theophrastum et Solutionem ad Chosroem Liber : edidit I. Bywater. Berolini, MDCCCLXXXVI.
- Vorsokr.* : Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker : griechisch und deutsch von Hermann Diels. Dritte Auflage, Berlin, 1912.
- Wim.* : Theophrasti Eresii Opera, quae supersunt, Omnia . . . recensuit . . . Fredericus Wimmer. Parisiis, MDCCCLXVI.



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I

*THEOPHRASTUS AS PSYCHOLOGIST OF
SENSE PERCEPTION, AND AS REPORTER
AND CRITIC OF OTHER PSYCHOLOGISTS*



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I

THE GENERAL VALUE OF HIS WRITING ON THE SENSES

THEOPHRASTUS'S work *On the Senses*, or *On Sense Perception and the Sensory Objects*,¹ is the most important source of our knowledge of the earlier Greek physiological psychology. Those interested primarily in the theory of the soul will ascribe to the historical portions of Aristotle's *De Anima* a higher value for the knowledge of his predecessors than to Theophrastus's account. But for an acquaintance with what these earlier investigators knew and thought of the observable processes of the mind—the processes by which we gain our impressions of the outer world and reproduce and elaborate these impressions; the processes of pleasure and pain; and the connection which all these and emotion and purpose and temperament have with the different parts or states of the body—of all these matters that are so important for modern psychology Theophrastus

¹ The title *Περὶ αἰσθήσεων* has the higher manuscript authority. But *Περὶ αἰσθήσεως* also appears; and this with the addition of *καὶ περὶ αἰσθητῶν* better describes the whole composition, and has often been adopted (v. Philippson, 85 n.; *Dox.* 499 n.). Yet even this enlargement does not indicate the real scope of the writing, which includes such topics as intelligence, pleasure and pain, temperament, and talent. That Theophrastus himself was deliberately including an account of the intellectual powers is shown by his words at the close of § 58.

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gives in this fragment a report far fuller than we find in Aristotle's *De Anima*, even when this is supplemented by the historical material in the other works of Aristotle. And one may in perfect justice go even farther and say that for a knowledge of Greek psychology before Plato,—apart from the question as to the nature of the soul, which Theophrastus in this writing almost wholly ignores,—we are indebted to Theophrastus for more than to all the other ancient authorities combined.² The *De Sensibus* is thus more than an account of the psychology of sense perception; it is rather an account of all that field, distinct from Rational Psychology, which later came to be known as Empirical Psychology and is now designated simply as Psychology.

But Theophrastus's work is more than a report of what his predecessors observed and thought. After a passionless and undistorted account of another's theories, there comes in almost every case a criticism, with a severity of logic that permits one better to know the kind of scrutiny to which these early psychological doctrines were subjected in the later Athenian universities. "Absurd" or "childish", Theophrastus does not hesitate to declare them, with marshalled evidence for his condemnation. Yet he keeps admirably clear the distinction between reporter and judge, and the reader is usually at no loss to know when the one and when the other is speaking.

But while, both as reporter and as judge, he seems studiously to hold back his own more positive conviction upon the topic under discussion, yet he does not wholly

² This statement, which may to some seem extravagant, is made only after a careful collation of the material in the *De Sensibus*, in the case of each of the authors there treated, with the material upon these men from other sources, as collected by Diels. And in such a comparison one is impressed not merely with the amount, but with the high accuracy in general of Theophrastus's report.

The Value of the *De Sensibus*

succeed in this restraint. In his very criticism one catches something of his view of the truth, some principle by which he judges, some observation of fact. And these chance utterances may now be gathered and supplemented by scattered statements in his other writings, that from these we may know something of his way of regarding those mental processes the history of whose psychology he is in the *De Sensibus* attempting to present.

II

THEOPHRASTUS'S OWN DOCTRINE UPON THE MAIN TOPICS OF THE *DE SENSIBUS*

SENSE PERCEPTION IN GENERAL

FOR Theophrastus, sense perception¹ is the 'principle' of conviction,² although our senses must in truth refer problems to our understanding.³ Yet sense perception and understanding stand in the same relation to the same need in the individual⁴—the need, we may believe, of acquaintance with fact. He argues against the thought that the senses are busied merely with deceptive appearance; when properly functioning, they lead to truth. Instead of holding that one perception is as good as another, and that because some of our sense reports are patently false, all must be

¹ Accounts of certain phases of perception in Theophrastus will be found in *A. and E. P.*, II, 396 ff.; Siebeck, *Geschichte der Psychologie*, I, 2, 184 ff.; Chaignet, *Histoire de la Psychologie des Grecs*, I, 267 ff.; Poppelreuter, *Zur Psychologie des Aristoteles, Theophrast, Strato*, 35 ff.; Prantl, *Aristoteles über die Farben*, 181 ff. The account by Chaignet is, in my judgment, the best of these.

² Fragment XIII (Wim. 417); and cf. Fragment XVIII (Wim. 418), and *De Caus. Pl.* 2, 3, 5.

³ Fragment XII (Wim. 414).

⁴ *De Sens.* 32.

Theophrastus's Own Doctrine

counted worthless, he believes that we must not hesitate to distinguish between those that are better and those that are worse, between the perceptions of the well and of the sick, perceptions that are "in accord with the reality of things" and perceptions whose natural intent is somehow defeated.⁵ In the usual course of things perception is "in accord with nature"; like the knowledge process generally, it is naturally aligned with what is better, working to our advantage, rather than to our confusion and loss.⁶ For Nature is ever pressing on toward what is Best.⁷

And because we have in perception a process that is in harmony with nature, rather than at variance with her, it is unreasonable to suppose that perception normally brings pain; on the contrary, processes in accord with nature bring pleasure. Often, it is true, perception is painful; for example, when the sensory stimulation is too intense or too persistent. But as for the contention that perception is invariably painful, as Anaxagoras had held—this is to fly in the face not only of clear reason but of the clear observation that usually there is no pain in our perception and sometimes there actually is pleasure. If perception were to be linked fixedly with either, we should expect it to be with pleasure; but actually it is connected inseparably with neither. For there seems here to be a variable connection, like that which we observe in the case of thought; for both sense perception and thought would be impossible were they unceasingly attended either by pleasure or by pain.⁸

Perception when at its best, as has just been said, reaches out to external fact; our senses are not, as Democritus had urged, avenues that lie in darkness and lead to no truth. And since Theophrastus thus requires

⁵ *De Sens.* 70.

⁶ *De Sens.* 31, 32.

⁷ *De Caus. Pl.* I, 16, 11; cf. *De Sens.* 32.

⁸ *De Sens.* 17, 31, 32, 33.

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us to recognize truth and reality in the objects of perception,⁹ a theory of perception is insufficient, he holds, if it describes merely the affections in ourselves and fails to reveal the reality that acts upon our senses, fails to make clear why this reality produces its peculiar effects in us.¹⁰ If perception reveals heat and cold,—and these, which have been regarded as the primal source of things, probably have an existence independent of our senses ;—if it reveals heat and cold, hard and soft, heavy and light, and if these be due to some independent reality, it seems reasonable to believe that the objects of our other senses also have a character that is 'objective' and not existent merely in the sensory act itself.¹¹

A theory of perception that confines itself to describing states in us is therefore insufficient. But equally insufficient is an explanation that neglects these states, that describes merely the external object and its inner constitution, and says nothing of the peculiar character of the sensory organs and of the sensory process in us. The passive factor, the recipient of the action, has a part in the total process and demands our attention, quite as much as does the agent in perception. The very fact that the same stimulus can have a variable effect according to the condition in which it finds our organs, convinces one that the scientist's attention must be directed beyond the stimulus, the 'object', the active feature in perception. The 'diathesis' of the perceptive organ must never be neglected.¹² An adequate account of taste, for example, must tell whether the stimulus is composed of what is like or of what is unlike the substance of the sense organ,

⁹ *De Sens.* 70.

¹⁰ *De Sens.* 89.

¹¹ *De Sens.* 71.

¹² *De Caus. Pl.* 6, 2, 1 ff. ; cf. *ibid.* 6, 5, 4, where the 'diathesis' again is spoken of, but not specifically of the sense organ.