

Demop. Exactly; and it is just for that reason that I want you to accept religion _cum grano salis_, and to see that the needs of the people must be met according to their powers of comprehension. Religion affords the only means of proclaiming and making the masses of crude minds and awkward intelligences, sunk in petty pursuits and material work, feel the high import of life. For the ordinary type of man, primarily, has no thought for anything else but what satisfies his physical needs and longings, and accordingly affords him a little amusement and pastime. Founders of religion and philosophers come into the world to shake him out of his torpidity and show him the high significance of existence: philosophers for the few, the emancipated; founders of religion for the many, humanity at large. For ?????????? ?????? ?????????? ??????, as your friend Plato has said, and you should not forget it. Religion is the metaphysics of the people, which by all means they must keep; and hence it must be eternally respected, for to discredit it means taking it away. Just as there is popular poetry, popular wisdom in proverbs, so too there must be popular metaphysics; for mankind requires most certainly _an interpretation of life_, and it must be in keeping with its power of comprehension. So that this interpretation is at all times an allegorical investiture of the truth, and it fulfils, as far as practical life and our feelings are concerned--that is to say, as a guidance in our affairs, and as a comfort and consolation in suffering and death--perhaps just as much as truth itself could, if we possessed it. Don't be hurt at its unpolished, baroque, and apparently absurd form, for you, with your education and learning, cannot imagine the roundabout ways that must be used in order

to make people in their crude state understand deep truths. The various religions are only various forms in which the people grasp and understand the truth, which in itself they could not grasp, and which is inseparable from these forms. Therefore, my dear fellow, don't be displeased if I tell you that to ridicule these forms is both narrow-minded and unjust.