

oligarchic party of all the cities within her sphere of influence, and in the same way Athens made common cause with the popular factions.

This fierce spirit of factionalism and party-selfishness was manifestly a chief cause of the relative instability of government in the city-state. Plato attributed it largely to the discrepancy of economic interests between those who have property and those who have none. The oligarch is interested in the protection of his property and the collection of his debts whatever hardship this works upon the poor. The democrat is prone to schemes for supporting idle and indigent citizens at public expense, that is, with money taken from the well-to-do. Thus in even the smallest city there are, Plato said, two cities, a city of the rich and a city of the poor, eternally at war with each other. So serious is this condition that Plato can see no cure for factionalism in Greek politics unless there is a profound change in the institution of private property. As a root-and-branch remedy he would abolish it outright, but at the very least he believes it necessary to do away with the great extremes of poverty and wealth. And the education of citizens to prefer civic welfare before everything else is hardly less important than the education of rulers. Incompetence and factionalism are two fundamental political evils that any plan for perfecting the city-state must meet.

THE STATE AS A TYPE

The theoretical or scientific implications of Plato's principle are not less important for him than the critical. (There is a good both for men and for states and to grasp this good, to see what it is and by what means it may be enjoyed, is a matter of knowledge.) Men have, indeed, all sorts of opinions about it and all sorts of impressionistic notions about how to reach it, but of opinions there is no end and among them there is little to choose. Knowledge about the good, if it could be attained, would be quite a different sort of thing. (There would, in the first place, be some rational guarantee for it; it would justify itself to some faculty other than that by which men hold opinions. And in the second place, it would be one and unchanging, not one thing at Athens and another at Sparta, but the same always and everywhere.) In short, it would belong to nature and not to the shifting winds of custom and convention. In

man as in other parts of the world there is something permanent, a "nature" as distinct from an appearance, and to grasp nature is just what discriminates knowledge from opinion. When Plato says that it is the philosopher who knows the good, this is no boast of omniscience; it is merely the assertion that there is an objective standard and that knowledge is better than guess-work. The analogy of professional or scientific knowledge is never far from Plato's mind. The statesman ought to know the good of a state as the physician knows health, and similarly he should understand the operation of disturbing or preserving causes. It is knowledge alone which distinguishes the true statesman from the false, as it is knowledge that distinguishes the physician from the quack.

To Plato when he wrote the *Republic* this determination to be scientific implied that his theory must sketch an ideal state and not merely describe an existing state. Though it may seem paradoxical, it is literally true that the *Republic* pictures a utopia not because it is a "romance," as Dunning imagines,⁵ but because Plato intended it to be the start of a scientific attack upon the "idea of the good." The statesman was really to know what the good is and consequently what is required to make a good state. He must know also what the state is, not in its accidental variations but as it is intrinsically or essentially. Incidentally, the philosopher's right to rule could only be vindicated if this were shown to be implied by the nature of the state. Plato's state must be a "state as such," a type or model of all states. No merely descriptive account of existing states would serve his purpose, and no merely utilitarian argument would vindicate the philosopher's right. (The general nature of the state as a kind or type is the subject of the book, and it is a secondary question whether actual states live up to the model or not.) This procedure accounts for the rather cavalier way in which Plato treats questions of practicability, which are likely to bother the modern reader. (It is easy to exaggerate his remoteness from actual conditions, but as he understood the problem, the question whether his ideal state could be produced really was irrelevant.) He was trying to show what in principle a state *must be*; if the facts are not like the principle, so much the worse for the facts. Or to put it a little differ-

⁵ *History of Political Theories, Ancient and Mediaeval* (1905), p. 24.

ently, he was assuming that the good is what it objectively is; whether men like it or can be persuaded to want it is another matter. To be sure, if virtue is knowledge, it may be presumed that men will want the good when they find out what it is, but the good will be none the better for that.

Plato's way of proceeding here will be much more intelligible if it is realized that his conception of what would make a satisfactory science of politics is built upon the procedure of geometry. The relation of his philosophy to Greek mathematics was exceedingly close, both because of the influence upon him of the Pythagoreans and because of the inclusion in his own School of at least two of the most important mathematicians and astronomers of the day. There is a tradition, indeed, that he refused to admit students who had not studied geometry. Moreover, Plato himself propounded to his students the problem of reducing the apparently erratic motions of the planets to simple geometric figures and the problem was solved by Eudoxus of Cnidos.⁶ This feat produced the first scientific theory of the planetary system and also the first approximation to a mathematical explanation of any natural phenomenon. In short, the method and the ideal of exact scientific explanation, which first appeared in Greek geometry and astronomy and which reappeared in the astronomy and mathematical physics of the seventeenth century, is one strand in the great Platonic tradition. It has its beginning precisely in the generation which saw the founding of the Academy and the writing of the *Republic*.

It is in no way surprising, therefore, that Plato should have imagined that progress in the rational understanding of the good life lay along a similar line. It was obvious to him that the precision of exact science depended upon a grasp of types; there is no geometry unless one is content to deal with idealized figures, neglecting the divergences and complications that occur in every representation of the type. All that empirical fact can claim, for example in astronomy, is that the types used shall "save the appearances"; in short, that the astronomer's deductions shall yield a result in agreement with what apparently is happening in the heavens. Manifestly the astronomer's types—his true

⁶ Sir Thomas Heath, *Aristarchus of Samos* (1913), chs. xv, xvi.

circles and triangles — tell what is “really” happening.⁷ In the same manner the *Republic* aims not to describe states but to find what is essential or typical in them — the general sociological principles upon which any society of human beings depends, in so far as it aims at a good life. The line of thought is substantially similar to that which caused Herbert Spencer to argue for a deductive “Absolute Ethics,” applying to the perfectly adapted man in the completely evolved society, as an ideal standard of reference for descriptive social studies.⁸ The utility or even the possibility of such a project, as conceived either by Plato or Spencer, may be doubted, but it is a gross error to think that Plato intended to loose his imagination for a flight into the regions of fancy.

RECIPROCAL NEEDS AND DIVISION OF LABOR

The proposition that the statesman should be a scientist who knows the idea of the good supplied Plato with a point of view from which he could criticise the city-state and also with a method that led to the ideal state. From this point he was led directly to his analysis of the typical state, and here again he found that he could follow the rule of specialization. The frequent analogies between the statesman and other kinds of skilled workers, artisans, or professional men, are in truth more than analogies. This is true because societies arise in the first place out of the needs of men, which can be satisfied only as they supplement each other. Men have many wants and no man is self-sufficient. Accordingly they take helpers and exchange with one another. The simplest example is, of course, the production and exchange of food and the other means of physical maintenance, but the argument can be extended far beyond the economic needs of a society. For Plato it afforded a general analysis for all association of men in social groups. Wherever there is society there is some sort of satisfaction of needs and some exchange of services for this purpose.

This analysis, introduced so simply and unobtrusively by Plato into his construction of the ideal state, was one of the pro-

⁷ Cf. the contrast of real astronomy and “star-gazing” (*Republic*, 529b-530c) and of science with computation throughout Plato’s account of the higher education in mathematics (522c-527c).

⁸ *Data of Ethics*, ch. xv.