

## CLASSES AND SOULS

It will be clear upon reflection that this argument makes an important assumption which is not explicitly stated by Plato. Individual capacities are assumed to be of such a sort that, when developed by a properly devised and controlled education, they will result in a harmonious social group. The difficulty with existing states has been that education has been wrong; or at all events, if better breeding is needed — and Plato believes that it is — an improvement of existing strains will accomplish the purpose. In other words, he takes for granted that there is nothing radically unsocial or antisocial in well-bred human beings which might result in disharmony precisely because of a complete and perfect development of individual powers. This assumption is not obviously true and many thinkers since Plato have questioned it; some have even gone to the length of supposing the opposite, namely, that socialized training must be more or less repressive of individual self-expression. But this possibility does not enter into Plato's calculations. While the assumption just mentioned is not explicitly stated, it does enter into the argument of the *Republic* at one point which is likely, without explanation, to be a little puzzling. This is the point at which the state is assumed to be merely the individual " writ large " <sup>11</sup> and at which, accordingly, the question about justice is transformed from the search for an individual virtue into the search for a property of the state. The difficulty of the transition, which seems to a modern reader a little artificial, is masked for Plato by the presumption that there is an inherent fitness of human nature for society and of society for human nature, and this fitness he interprets as a parallelism. (Both man and the state have a single underlying structure which prevents the good for one from being essentially different from the good for the other.)

It must be admitted that this assumption is responsible for much that is most attractive in the ethical ideal of the city-state and in Plato's representation of it. (It explains why, in Plato's ethics, there is no ultimate cleft between inclination and duty or between the interests of individuals and those of the society to which they belong.) Where such conflicts arise — and the *Re-*

*public* was written because they do arise — the problem is one of development and adjustment, not of repression and force. What the unsocial individual needs is a better understanding of his own nature and a fuller development of his powers in accordance with that knowledge. His internal conflict is not an unappeasable strife between what he wants to do and what he ought to do, because in the last resort the full expression of his natural powers is both what he really wants and what he is entitled to have. On the other hand, what the inharmonious society needs is to provide just those possibilities of complete development for its citizens which their needs demand. The problem of the good state and of the good man are two sides of the same question, and the answer to one must at the same time give the answer to the other. Morality ought to be at once private and public and if it is not so, the solution lies in correcting the state and improving the individual until they reach their possible harmony. It may very well be doubted whether, in general terms, any better moral ideal than this has ever been stated.

At the same time Plato's attempt to make one analysis do duty for both the state and the individual yields him a theory much too simple to solve his problem. The analysis of the state shows that there are three necessary functions to be performed. The underlying physical needs must be supplied and the state must be protected and governed. The principle of specialization demands that essential services should be distinguished, and it follows that there are three classes: the workers who produce and the "guardians," who in turn are divided, though not so sharply, into the soldiers and the rulers, or the philosopher-king if he be a single ruler. But since division of functions rests on difference of aptitude, the three classes depend upon the fact that there are three kinds of men, those who are fitted by nature to work but not to rule, those who are fit to rule but only under the control and direction of others, and finally those who are fit for the highest duties of statesmanship such as the final choice of means and ends. These three aptitudes imply on the psychological side three vital powers or "souls," that which includes the appetitive or nutritive faculties and which Plato supposes to reside below the diaphragm, that which is executive or "spirited" and which resides in the chest, and that which knows or thinks, the rational soul which is

situated in the head. It would seem natural that each soul should have its own special excellence or virtue, and Plato does in fact carry out this plan in part. Wisdom is the excellence of the rational soul and courage of the active, but he hesitates to say that temperance can be confined to the nutritive soul. Justice is the proper interrelation of the three functions, whether of the classes in the state or of the faculties in an individual.

It would probably be a mistake to put too much stress upon this theory of the "three souls." Plato seems never to have tried seriously to develop it, and often in psychological discussion he does not use it. Moreover, it is certainly not true that in the *Republic* the three classes are so sharply separated as his schematic statement of the theory would lead one to expect. The classes are certainly not castes, for membership in them is not hereditary. On the contrary his ideal seems to be a society in which every child born is given the highest training that his natural powers permit him to profit by, and in which every individual is advanced to the highest position in the state that his achievements (his capacity *plus* his education and experience) enable him to fill adequately. Plato in the *Republic* showed himself remarkably free from temperamental class-prejudice, much freer than Aristotle, for example, and freer than he seems to be in the outline of the second-best state in the *Laws*. But when all these allowances are made, the fact remains that the parallelism assumed between mental capacities and social classes is a restricting influence which prevented him from doing justice in the *Republic* to the complexity of the political problems under discussion. The theory obliged him to assume that all the intelligence in the state was concentrated in the rulers, though his repeated references to the skill of the artisans in their own kind of work shows that he did not literally believe this. On the other hand, in their political capacity the workers have nothing to do but obey, which is nearly the same thing as to say that they have no properly political capacity at all. The position to which they are assigned cannot be corrected even by education, because they seem not to need education for civic activity or for participation in the self-governing activities of the community. In this part of the state's life they are onlookers.

This result has often been attributed, as for example by Edward

Zeller,<sup>12</sup> to a contempt for artisans and the handicrafts as compared with intellectual labor, but in truth Plato showed a more genuine admiration for manual skill than Aristotle. The explanation is to be found rather in the assumption that good government is nothing but a matter of knowledge and that knowledge is always the possession of a class of experts, like the practice of medicine. According to Plato most men are permanently in the relation to their rulers of a patient to his physician. Aristotle asked a pertinent question on this point when he inquired whether there are not cases where experience is a better guide than the knowledge of an expert.<sup>13</sup> A man who has to live in a house need not rely on a builder to tell him whether it is commodious or not. But Plato's ideas about sound knowledge when he wrote the *Republic* allowed little importance to experience. The result was that he failed to grasp one of the most significant political aspects of the city-state whose civil life he desired to perfect. His distrust of "happy versatility" was so great that he swung to the opposite extreme and allowed to artisans no capacity for public service except their trades. The old free give and take of the town-meeting and the council is utterly gone, and this side of human personality, which the Athenian democrat valued above everything, must be quite eradicated from the masses. So far as the higher activities of life are concerned, they live in a state of tutelage to wiser men.

#### JUSTICE

The theory of the state in the *Republic* culminates in the conception of justice. Justice is the bond which holds a society together, a harmonious union of individuals each of whom has found his life-work in accordance with his natural fitness and his training. It is both a public and a private virtue because the highest good both of the state and of its members is thereby conserved. There is nothing better for a man than to have his work and to be fitted to do it, there is nothing better for other men and for the whole society than that each should thus be filling the station to which he is entitled.

<sup>12</sup> *Plato and the Older Academy*. Trans. by S. F. Alleyne and Alfred Goodwin, 1888, p. 473.

<sup>13</sup> *Politics*, 3, 11; 1282a 17 ff.