

Social justice thus may be defined as the principle of a society, consisting of different types of men . . . who have combined under the impulse of their need for one another, and by their combination in one society, and their concentration on their separate functions, have made a whole which is perfect because it is the product and the image of the whole of the human mind.¹⁴

This is Plato's elaboration of the *prima facie* definition of justice as "giving to every man his due." For what is due *to* him is that he should be treated as what he is, in the light of his capacity and his training, while what is due *from* him is the honest performance of those tasks which the place accorded him requires.

To a modern reader such a definition of justice is at least as striking for what it omits as for what it includes. In no sense is it a juristic definition. For it lacks the notion, connoted by the Latin word *ius* and the English word right, of powers of voluntary action in the exercise of which a man will be protected by law and supported by the authority of the state. Lacking this conception Plato does not mean by justice, except remotely, the maintenance of public peace and order; at least, external order is but a small part of the harmony which makes the state. (What the state provides its citizens is not so much freedom and protection as a life — all the opportunities for social interchange which make up the necessities and the amenities of a civilized existence.) It is true that in such a social life there are rights, just as there are duties, but they can hardly be said to belong in any peculiar sense to individuals. They are inherent rather in the services or functions that individuals perform. (Resting as it does upon the principle that the state is created by mutual needs, the analysis runs necessarily in terms of services and not of powers.) Even the ruler is no exception, for he has merely the special function to which his wisdom entitles him. (The notion of authority or sovereign power, such as the Roman attached to his magistracies, has practically no part in Plato's political theory, nor indeed in that of any Greek philosopher.)

This completes the general outline of Plato's theory of the state. Starting from the conception that the good must be known by methodical study, the theory constructs society around this

¹⁴ E. Barker, *Greek Political Theory, Plato and his Predecessors* (1925), pp. 176 f.

idea by showing that the principle is implicit in all society. The division of labor and the specialization of tasks are the conditions of social co-operation, and the problem of the philosopher-king is to arrange these matters in the most advantageous way. Because human nature is innately and inherently social, the maximum advantage to the state means also the maximum advantage to citizens. The goal is therefore a perfect adjustment of human beings to the possibilities of significant employment which the state affords. The remainder of Plato's argument might almost be described as a corollary. The only remaining question concerns the means by which the statesman can bring about the adjustment required. Broadly speaking there are only two ways to take hold of this problem. Either the special hindrances to good citizenship may be removed or the positive conditions of good citizenship may be developed. The first results in the theory of communism and the second in the theory of education.

PROPERTY AND THE FAMILY

Plato's communism takes two main forms which meet in the abolition of the family. The first is the prohibition of private property, whether houses or land or money, to the rulers and the provision that they shall live in barracks and have their meals at a common table. The second is the abolition of a permanent monogamous sexual relation and the substitution of regulated breeding at the behest of the rulers for the purpose of securing the best possible offspring. This bracketing of the two social functions of procreating children and of producing and owning goods was more obvious in a society that lived mainly under a household economy than it is now. A radical innovation in respect to the one coalesced readily with an innovation in respect to the other. Communism in the *Republic*, however, applies only to the guardian class, that is, to the soldiers and rulers, while the artisans are to be left in possession of their private families, both property and wives. How this is to be made consistent with promotion from the lower rank to the higher is not explained. But the truth is that Plato does not take the trouble to work out his plan in much detail. Still more striking is the fact that, in connection with his theory of private property, he does not have anything to say about slaves. It is a fact that Plato's state seem-

ingly might exist without slavery, since no work especially to be done by slaves is mentioned, a respect in which the state of the *Laws* is strikingly different. This has led Constantin Ritter to argue that in the *Republic* slavery is "in principle abolished."¹⁵ But it is almost incredible that Plato intended to abolish a universal institution without mentioning it. It is more probable that he merely regarded slavery as unimportant.

Plato was in no way unique in believing that an economic cleavage between the citizens of a state is a most dangerous political condition. In general, the Greeks were quite frank in admitting that economic motives are very influential in determining political action and political affiliation. Long before the *Republic* was written Euripides had divided citizens into three classes, the useless rich who are always greedy for more, the poor who have nothing and are devoured by envy, and the middle class, the sturdy yeomanry, who "save states."¹⁶ The oligarchical state to a Greek meant a state governed by, and in the interest of, the well-born among whom the possession of property is hereditary, while a democratic state was one governed by and for the "many," who have neither birth nor property. The economic difference was the key to the political distinction, as is quite clear from Plato's account of oligarchy.¹⁷ The importance of economic causes in politics was therefore no new idea, and in believing that great diversity of wealth was inconsistent with good government Plato was following a common conviction which represented Greek experience through many generations. The causes of civic unrest in Athens had been mainly of this sort from at least the days of Solon.)

So firmly was Plato convinced of the pernicious effects of wealth upon government that he saw no way to abolish the evil except by abolishing wealth itself, so far as soldiers and rulers are concerned. To cure the greed of rulers there is no way short of denying them the right to call anything their own. Devotion to their civic calling admits no private rival. The example of Sparta, where citizens were denied the use of money and the privilege of engaging in trade, doubtless weighed with Plato in reaching this

¹⁵ *Platon, sein Leben, seine Schriften, seine Lehre* (1923), Vol. II, p. 596.

¹⁶ *The Suppliants*, ll. 238-245.

¹⁷ *Republic*, 551d.

conclusion. His reasons, however, should be carefully noted. He was not in the least concerned to do away with inequalities of wealth because they are unjust to the individuals concerned. His purpose was to produce the greatest degree of unity in the state, and private property is incompatible with this. The emphasis is characteristic of Greek thought, for when Aristotle criticises communism, he does so not on the ground that it is unfair but on the ground that it would not in fact produce the unity desired. Plato's communism has, therefore, a strictly political purpose. The order of ideas is exactly the reverse of that which has mainly animated modern socialist utopias; he does not mean to use government to equalize wealth, but he equalizes wealth in order to remove a disturbing influence in government.

The same is true also of Plato's purpose in abolishing marriage, since he regards family affection, directed toward particular persons, as another potent rival to the state in competing for the loyalty of rulers. Anxiety for one's children is a form of self-seeking more insidious than the desire for property, and the training of children in private homes he regards as a poor preparation for the whole-souled devotion which the state has a right to demand. But in the case of marriage Plato had other purposes as well. He was appalled at the casualness of human mating, which, as he says, would not be tolerated in the breeding of any domestic animal. The improvement of the race demands a more controlled and a more selective type of union. Finally, the abolition of marriage was probably an implied criticism of the position of women in Athens, where her activities were summed up in keeping the house and rearing her children. To Plato this seemed to deny to the state the services of half its potential guardians. Moreover, he was unable to see that there is anything in the natural capacity of women that corresponds to the Athenian practice, since many women are as well qualified as men to take part in political or even military duties. The women of the guardian class will consequently share all the work of the men, which makes it necessary both that they shall receive the same education and be free from strictly domestic duties.

To a modern taste there is something a little startling about the coolly un sentimental way in which Plato argues from the breeding