

Plato desired particularly an esthetic appreciation of these works. He regarded them rather as a means of moral and religious education, somewhat in the way that Christians have regarded the Bible. For this reason he proposed not only to expurgate drastically the poets of the past, but to submit the poets of the future to censorship by the rulers of the state, in order that nothing of bad moral influence might fall into the hands of the young. For a man who was a consummate artist himself Plato had a singularly philistine conception of art. Or perhaps it would be truer to say that when he wrote about the moral purpose of art a certain puritanical, almost an ascetic, strain is apparent which seems in general out of character for a fourth-century Greek, though it is a strain which appears elsewhere in Plato. Philosophically this is connected with the very sharp contrast of mind and body, most evident in the *Phaedo*, which passed from Plato to Christianity. The poverty which Plato exacts of his rulers perhaps shows the same tendency, as do also the preference which he expressed for a very primitive (non-luxurious) sort of state at the beginning of his construction of the ideal state, and the suggestion accompanying the Myth of the Den that the philosopher may have to be forced to descend from a life of contemplation to take part in the affairs of man. Obviously the rule of philosophers might easily become a rule of the saints. (Probably the closest analogue that has ever existed to Plato's ideal state is a monastic order.

(Undoubtedly the most original as well as the most characteristic proposal in the *Republic* is the system of higher education, by which selected students are to be prepared, between the ages of twenty and thirty-five, for the highest positions in the guardian class.) The relation of such a conception of higher education to the founding of the Academy and to the whole plan for a science and art of statemanship has been sufficiently stressed. Unless it be the Academy, there was nothing in Greek education upon which Plato could have built, the idea was entirely and characteristically his own. The higher education of the guardians was in purpose professional and for his curriculum (Plato chose the only scientific studies known to him — mathematics, astronomy, and logic.) Beyond doubt he believed that these most exact studies are the only adequate introduction to the study of philosophy, and there is little reason to doubt that he expected the philosopher's special object

of study — the idea of the good — to yield results of comparable precision and exactness. For this reason the outline of the ideal state properly culminates in the plan for an education in which such studies would be fostered, in which new investigations would be undertaken and new knowledge placed at the disposal of rulers. In order to appreciate the greatness of such a conception it is not necessary to believe that Plato was right in hoping for a science of politics as exact as mathematics. It is hardly fair to demand more of him than that he should have tried to follow the lead which, in his own hands and those of his students, was creating in mathematics perhaps the truest monument to human intelligence.

THE OMISSION OF LAW

Few books that claim to be treatises on politics are so closely reasoned or so well co-ordinated as the *Republic*. None perhaps contains a line of thought so bold, so original, or so provocative. It is this quality which has made it a book for all time, from which later ages have drawn the most varied inspiration. For the same reason its greatest importance is general and diffused, rather than the result of specific imitation. The *Republic* was the greatest of utopias and the whole tribe of utopian philosophers followed it, but this phase of the book interested Plato so little that he was almost careless in carrying through the details of the plan. (The true romance of the *Republic* is the romance of free intelligence, unbound by custom, untrammelled by human stupidity and self-will, able to direct the forces even of custom and stupidity themselves along the road to a rational life.) The *Republic* is eternally the voice of the scholar, the profession of faith of the intellectual, who sees in knowledge and enlightenment the forces upon which social progress must rely. And indeed, who can say what are the limits of knowledge as a political force, and what society has yet brought to bear upon its problems the full power of trained scientific intelligence?

Yet it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that in the *Republic* Plato, like most intellectuals, simplified his problem beyond what the province of human relations will bear. } An enlightened despotism — and Plato is right when he concludes that government by intelligence must be government by the few — cannot be

merely assumed to be the last word in politics. The presumption that government is purely a matter of scientific knowledge, which the mass of men can resign into the hands of a few highly trained experts, leaves out of account the profound conviction that there are some decisions which a man must make for himself. This is no argument certainly for "muddling through" in cases where muddling means only the bungling choice of means for recognized ends. But Plato's argument assumes that the choice of ends is exactly comparable with the choice of means for an end already agreed upon, and this appears to be simply not true. His comparison of government to medicine, carried through to its farthest extreme, reduces politics to something that is not politics. For an adult, responsible human being, even though he be something less than a philosopher, is certainly not a sick man who requires nothing but expert care. Among other things he requires the privilege of taking care of himself and of acting responsibly with other like responsible human beings. (A principle which reduces political subordination to one type, the relation of those who know to those who do not know, is simpler than the facts.

Not the least significant aspect of the *Republic* is what it omits, namely, law and the influence of public opinion. The omission is perfectly logical, for Plato's argument is unanswerable if his premise is granted. If rulers are qualified merely by their superior knowledge, either the judgment of public opinion upon their acts is irrelevant or else the pretense of consulting it is a mere piece of political Jesuitry by which the "discontent of the masses" is held in check. Similarly, it is as foolish to bind the hands of the philosopher-king with the rules of law as to force an expert physician to copy his prescription from the recipes in a medical textbook. But in reality the argument begs the question. For (it assumes that public opinion is nothing but a muddled representation of what the ruler already knows more clearly, and that law has no meaning other than to give the least bungling rule that will fit an average case.) And this is not a description but a caricature. As Aristotle said, the knowledge of a thing in use and by direct experience is different in kind from a scientist's knowledge about it, and presumably it is just this immediate experience of the pressures and burdens of government, of their bearing upon human interests and ends, that public opinion expresses. Pre-

sumably also the law contains not merely an average rule but also an accumulation of the results of applying intelligence to concrete cases and also an ideal of equitable treatment of like cases.

At all events the ideal state of the *Republic* was simply a denial of the political faith of the city-state, with its ideal of free citizenship and its hope that every man, within the limits of his powers, might be made a sharer in the duties and privileges of government. For this ideal was founded on the conviction that there is an ineradicable moral distinction between subjection to the law and subjection to the will of another human being, even though that other be a wise and benevolent despot. The difference is that the first is compatible with a sense of freedom and dignity while the second is not. The sense of his own freedom under the law was precisely the element in the city-state upon which the Greek set the highest moral valuation and which made the difference, to his mind, between a Greek and a barbarian. And this conviction, it must be acknowledged, has passed from the Greeks into the moral ideals of most European governments. It was expressed in the principle that "governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed," and vague as the meaning of consent is, it is hard to imagine that the ideal itself will disappear. For this reason Plato's omission of law from his ideal state cannot be interpreted otherwise than as a failure to perceive a striking moral aspect of the very society which he desired to perfect.

At the same time it is clear that Plato could not have included the law as an essential element of the state without reconstructing the whole philosophical framework of which the ideal state is a part. Its omission was not a matter of caprice but a logical consequence of the philosophy itself. For if scientific knowledge has always the superiority to popular opinion which Plato supposes, there is no ground for that respect for law which would make it the sovereign power in the state. Law belongs to the class of convention; it rises through use and wont; it is the product of experience growing slowly from precedent to precedent. A wisdom which arises by rational insight into nature cannot abdicate its claims before the claim of law unless law itself has access to a kind of wisdom different from that which scientific

reason possesses. If, then, Plato is wrong in trying to make the state over into an educational institution, if this puts a load upon education which it is not able to bear, the philosophical principles — especially the sharp contrast of nature and convention and of reason and experience — need to be reexamined. It is the suspicion that this might be the case, at least the sense that the theory in the *Republic* had not got to the bottom of all the problems involved, that led Plato in his later years to canvass the place of law in the state and to formulate in the *Laws* another type of state in which law rather than knowledge should be the ruling force.