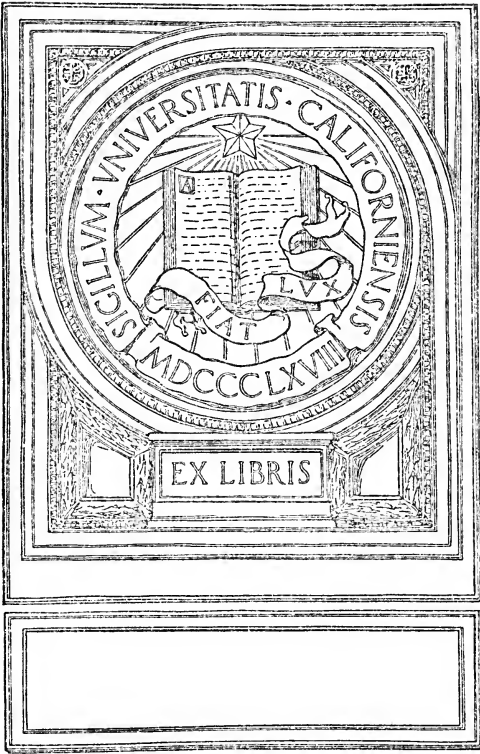


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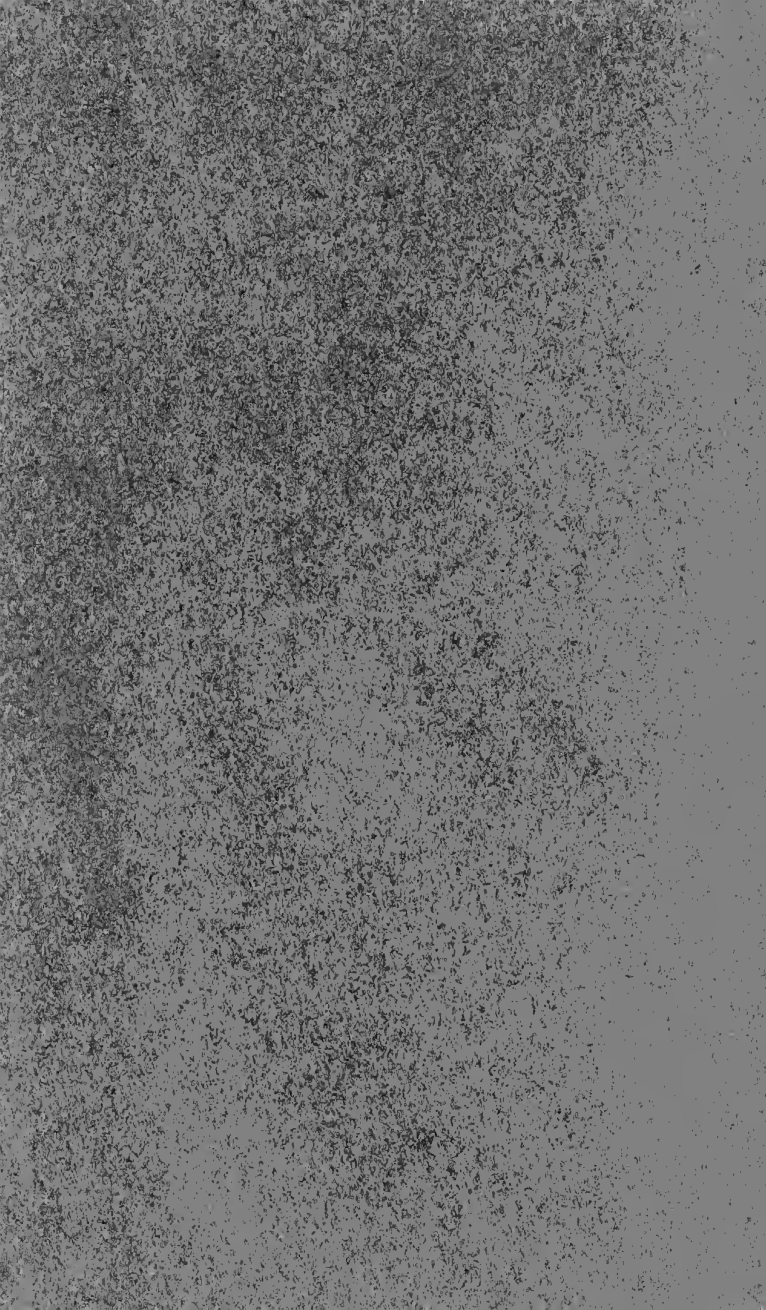


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# PLATO AND CHRISTIANITY



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PLATO  
AND  
CHRISTIANITY

THREE LECTURES

BY

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## NOTE

THESE lectures were delivered in the Hall of Christ Church, Oxford, during the Extension Summer Meeting of August, 1915. The first two were again delivered in substance in the Hall of King's College, London, during March, 1916, at the invitation of the London District of the Workers' Educational Association. On both occasions several members of the audience expressed a hope that they might be published.

W. T.

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# PLATO AND CHRISTIANITY

## LECTURE I

### GENERAL PHILOSOPHY

It is very difficult to say what constitutes the peculiar genius of any race or nation, but in the case of the Ancient Greeks this is easier than in most. We may perhaps best summarise their predominant characteristic and their great gift to the world in the phrase, "Intellectual passion." Both terms are necessary. To most of us the intellect and the search for truth appear lacking in human warmth; men contrast reason with intuition on one side, and with feeling on the other. Of course, there is a ground for this contrast, but in the great Greeks feeling and intellect are united with astonishing closeness. The

great minds among them had a living passion for truth, such as among us is only stimulated as a rule by a person to whom we are devoted, or a practical cause to which we have given our lives; the only metaphors adequate to describe the yearning of their souls for truth or the rapture of attainment are drawn from human love in its intensest shape. It is because of this that their great gifts to the world are twofold—both scientific and artistic.

The beauty which they express is, upon the whole, what we should call intellectual beauty; even in their sublimest moments they shrink from anything that suggests licence or lack of order. Their typical art is sculpture, and in sculpture what happens is that the artist gives significance to a shapeless mass of marble, or whatever it may be, by reducing it within limits that are themselves determined by the principle of proportion. A Greek temple gains its beauty by proportion and nothing else; it has none of the wild efflorescence of Gothic art. This is partly, perhaps, because civilisation was a thing so new, so precious, and so permanently threatened both by the barbarism of surrounding



nations and by the survival of barbarism in the souls of the Greeks themselves, that they never really dared to let themselves go. But this is not the whole reason; it is also true to say that their appreciation and love was for the orderly, the coherent, the proportioned. Beauty is for them the sensuous form of truth, and truth is the indwelling and vital principle of beauty. The intuition of Keats was quite right when he put his lines—

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know”—

at the end of the poem on the “Grecian Urn.”

For us the search for truth has become more complicated, more scientific and argumentative; while, so far at any rate as we have dared to trust the spirit of Christianity, the pursuit of beauty has become less restrained and more freely impulsive. For the Greeks the two things are almost one; for them science and art are as near together as they can ever be. Truth and beauty are twin apprehensions of the same aspiring intellect, and it is in Plato that this passion of intellect, at once in its scientific

and in its artistic forms, reaches its supreme expression.

Plato was the disciple of Socrates, and it is appropriate to say something, with the dogmatism necessary to brevity, about the place of Socrates in Greek life, and the relation of Plato to him. (Socrates was regarded by his enemies as one of the sophists. The sophists were men who arose in response to the demand created by the growth of democracy; it suddenly became possible for men to achieve power and fame by influencing their fellow citizens. In the law courts and in the public assemblies there was a great opening for persuasive speakers. The sophists undertook to instruct men in the art of success.) There is an American advertisement which represents a truculent man shaking his fist in the reader's face, and saying—"I can make you a forcible speaker"; that is the advertisement of a sophist, though in all probability this sophist is a quack, while many of the Greek sophists were genuinely great men. Great as they were, however, it remains true that their aim was to teach success, and that only. The natural result of the sharpening of a

young man's argumentative power is that he becomes critical of all conventions which thwart his own desires, including the most fundamental moral conventions, and the influence of the sophist upon the young men of Greece was to make them even more rebellious than the younger generation invariably is against the wisdom of its elders. Moreover, the elders had not been in the habit of asking questions about these matters, and were consequently ill able to meet on intellectual grounds the questions raised by the juniors. The result was that the younger generation began to break more and more away from the code of morality on which Greek civilisation rested. The task of Socrates was to insist that the moral code, in principle at least, is right, but that its real grounds are not those conventionally accepted. This was the only way in which the rising tide of moral infidelity could be stemmed; but naturally the respectable old Athenians did not understand it. When a man remarked on the justice of Aristides or some other commonplace, and Socrates would approach him with such words as—"I am deeply inter-

ested in what you say ; now can you tell me what is that quality in Aristides in virtue of which you call him just ? ”—and when the respectable Athenian found himself unable to give an answer which the criticism of Socrates did not at once reduce to silliness, he only came to the conclusion that Socrates was concerned to pour ridicule on morality. In the end they condemned him to death for setting up false gods and corrupting the young men. (He is the first martyr to intellectual truth, and his martyrdom is the most influential single event in the history of intellectual progress.)

It is very difficult to determine whether or not Socrates was himself a great philosopher. It depends upon the view we take of the respective merits, from an historical point of view, of Plato and Xenophon. Considerable reason has lately been shown for holding that the Platonic works down to, and including, the *Republic* and *Phaedrus*, and even the *Theætetus*, are to be traced to Socrates himself, and that Plato's independent development only starts with the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist*. The view which has been traditional

in England is rather that the philosophy of the Platonic Dialogues is only Socratic down to the end of the *Protagoras*. On the former view, Socrates must be regarded, not only as a martyr to the philosophic cause, but also as himself a supremely great philosopher. According to the latter and more traditional view, his contribution was little more than the impetus which he gave to his disciples, and particularly to Plato. I shall myself follow this traditional view, not so much because I feel convinced of its truth, though my inclination is in that direction, but because it enables us more easily than the other to take the works of Plato as they stand, without discussing at any given point where the independent thought of Plato starts, for, according to this view, all the really important Dialogues represent such independent thought. After all, the question of origin is mainly one of antiquarian interest. For us the works of Plato are a complete whole which we can read and study. Socrates left no writings. It is the living thought which is of consequence to us, not the question who should have the credit for it. We will there-

fore take the Dialogues as they stand and try to summarise their leading points.

Aristotle tells us in the first book of his *Metaphysics* that Plato was a disciple, not only of Socrates, but also of Cratylus. From Socrates, he learned to look for definitions and to pursue inquiry by means of relevant instances ; and from Socrates also he learned to believe in the certainty of our knowledge of moral principles. Cratylus was himself a disciple of Heraclitus, and from him Plato learned to believe in the universal flux of the whole phenomenal world. (The development of his thought may be regarded as a product of the collision between Socrates' doctrine of moral certainty and Heraclitus' doctrine of universal flux.) We have become quite used to this latter idea ; we have found that in practice it does not make life insecure nor any more transitory than it would be if the perpetual change of physical objects had never been discovered at all. But this was not so at first ; in the early days men were exceedingly perplexed as to the possibility of any knowledge or certainty in a perpetually changing world. We have become indifferent to the

problem, but the problem is still there, and every now and then some new application of the law of flux raises it again in an acute form. For example, when Darwin suddenly popularised the idea of biological evolution, it seemed to very many people that everything was now reduced to a transition from one phase to another. Morality was merely a convention of the passing period; it had no permanent significance or application. We have again largely outgrown this perplexity, but again it is rather through becoming indifferent to it than through properly solving it; the problem is still there. It is because of this combination of ideas, due to Socrates on the one hand and to Cratylus on the other, that Plato, in the words of Edward Caird, "did more than anyone else before or since to open up all the questions with which the philosophy of religion has to deal."

While still entirely under the Socratic influence, Plato begins with the question so commonly asked in Greece—Can virtue be taught? This is the problem of the *Protagoras*. It has been pointed out that in that Dialogue Socrates, though victorious of course in

dialectic, concludes by establishing the opposite position to that which he had set out to defend, while Protagoras himself has similarly changed his ground. This suggests that Plato at this date is already feeling the need of passing beyond the historic teaching of Socrates.

In the next Dialogue, the *Meno*, he continues the same subject. His conclusion here is that most virtue is based on opinion only, not upon knowledge. Knowledge is distinguished from right opinion simply by the thinking out of its ground. (When we know, we not only believe what is in fact true, but we are able to say why it is true. For practical purposes, right opinion is entirely equivalent to knowledge while it lasts.) If I want to know the road to Larissa or to Abingdon and ask a passer-by, he may possibly say—"That is the road: I know, because I have just come along it"; or he may only be able to say "I think it is that road." Supposing that he is right, his opinion is as good a guide as his knowledge would have been. But opinion is unstable; it may easily be changed, and a right opinion which can give no reasoned justification for



itself is therefore a precarious basis for life. This, then, is the answer to the question—“Why have not the men of great virtue imparted their virtue to their sons?” (It is because they were good through right opinion only, and not through knowledge.) They could not give the reason for their principles of action, and consequently, while they had virtue in themselves, they could not convince others of its claim. Here for the moment the question is dropped; but most characteristically the new-found distinction between knowledge and opinion is immediately applied to politics in the *Gorgias*. But here the reflection has gone further; it is no longer admitted that the great statesmen of Athens had virtue at all; they were not even really statesmen; for they did not fill the city with its true treasures, which are Temperance and Justice, but only with harbours, war-ships and tribute, and rubbish of this character. Socrates himself is the only real statesman, for only he has even tried to base political action upon rational principle (517–522).

The *Meno*, besides containing the first

definite distinction between knowledge and opinion, also sets the problem how it is possible to learn anything. I set out in search of some idea which is to be the solution of a perplexity; but either I already know that of which I am in search, or else I do not; if I know it, the search is endless, and if I do not know it, it is futile, for I should not recognise the object of the search even if I came upon it. The answer to this is somewhat startling. Without argument Plato throws down the tremendous dogma, and that, moreover, as it were by the way in a subordinate clause—"Seeing that nature is all of it akin." (81 c.)

(The result of this kinship in all nature is that there is a genuine connection between any one apprehended fact or truth and all other facts and truths. Consequently, the presence in the mind of any apprehension may give rise to the grasp of kindred truths.) He goes further; inasmuch as before birth the soul in the spiritual world has had a vision of all truth, but has at birth forgotten it, the perception of the various facts which constitute our experience may revive in the mind

a recollection of the kindred facts, which in that pre-natal vision the soul had apprehended. (Knowledge, in other words, is recollection.) The evidence of this is a dialogue between Socrates and a slave boy, from whom, by means of extraordinarily leading questions, Socrates succeeds in educing mathematical knowledge which the boy had never learned.<sup>1</sup>

This doctrine of "recollection," however, does not supply knowledge with an adequate object; the empirical facts, which are the occasion of the recollection, belong to the world of flux, but it is not possible that the object of knowledge should itself be perpetually changing, for if it were, the knowledge would become false—that is, ignorance—in the very process of its own formation. In the *Cratylus* the two persons who carry on the discussion are Cratylus and Socrates, that is to say the two men from whom, according to Aristotle, Plato received his own philosophic

<sup>1</sup> It may be worth while in passing to note the fact that the boy answers in a straightforward way so long as his answers seem to be right, but on discovering that they are not, at once starts swearing. οὐ μὰ Δία (83 b.)

training—Socrates, from whom he had learned to believe in the possibility of knowledge, at least in the moral sphere, and Cratylus, from whom he had learned to believe in the incessant changefulness of all empirical facts. At the end of this dialogue Socrates raises the question whether there are eternal forms or ideas, which remain themselves absolutely unchanged while various physical objects conform to them in greater or less degree as their changeful process runs its course. The existence of these forms or ideas is something which Socrates says he often dreams to be true, but there is no definite assertion of the doctrine, and the dialogue ends with the statement that perhaps they exist and perhaps they do not. (440 d.)

It is also noticeable that in this dialogue the idea seems to be, not an independent entity, but a teleological principle. The form of the shuttle is simply that which will meet the weaver's purpose. (389 b.)

In the *Symposium* the atmosphere is quite different, and the same is true of the *Phaedo*. Here there is no doubt at all about the existence of the eternal Ideas. Either Plato

now reaches this belief himself, or else he now gives it an entirely new prominence; for a mere outline understanding of his thought such as we are attempting, it does not very much matter which. (Proper study leads to an apprehension of the Ideas by the pure intellect, and therein to a perfect satisfaction of the soul.) The language used, both of the apprehension itself and of the satisfaction which it brings, is the language of rapture and ecstasy. This is largely borrowed from the experience of those who were initiated in the mysteries at Eleusis. In the *Symposium*, Plato speaks in such a way as to suggest that he had himself received a vision of the perfect beauty. I have attempted elsewhere (*Mind*, N.S. XVII, p. 502) to give an account of the psychological occasion of this vision and the particular influence which it may have had upon the line of his philosophic thought. The other Dialogue which most definitely suggests the occurrence of such a vision is the *Phaedrus*. It is of some interest to notice that another man of genius, not unlike Plato in some points of his temperament, has recorded a similar experience. In Shelley's

*Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* these lines occur—

- “ Spirit of Beauty, that dost consecrate  
 With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon  
 Of human thought or form,—where art thou gone ?  
 Why dost thou pass away and leave our state,  
 This dim vast vale of tears, vacant and desolate ?  
 Ask why the sunlight not for ever  
 Weaves rainbows o’er yon mountain river,  
 Why aught should fail and fade that once is shown,  
 Why fear and dream and death and birth  
 Cast on the daylight of this earth  
 Such gloom,—why man has such a scope  
 For love and hate, despondency and hope ?
- “ Love, Hope, and Self-esteem, like clouds depart  
 And come, for some uncertain moments lent,  
 Man were immortal, and omnipotent,  
 Didst thou, unknown and awful as thou art,  
 Keep with thy glorious train firm state within his heart.  
 Thou messenger of sympathies,  
 That wax and wane in lovers’ eyes—  
 Thou—that to human thought art nourishment,  
 Like darkness to a dying flame !  
 Depart not as thy shadow came,  
 Depart not—lest the grave should be,  
 Like life and fear, a dark reality.
- “ While yet a boy I sought for ghosts, and sped  
 Thro’ many a listening chamber, cave and ruin,  
 And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing  
 Hopes of high talk with the departed dead.  
 I called on poisonous names with which our youth is fed;  
 I was not heard—I saw them not—  
 When musing deeply on the lot

Of life, at the sweet time when winds are wooing  
 All vital things that wake to bring  
 News of birds and blossoming,—  
 Sudden, thy shadow fell on me ;  
 I shrieked, and clasped my hands in ecstasy !

I vowed that I would dedicate my powers  
 To thee and thine—have I not kept the vow ? ”

But whatever the occasion, whether there was any actual vision or not, at least belief in the eternal Ideas becomes now the governing principle of Plato's thought. In the *Symposium* (210 a–211 c) he describes the ascent of the soul towards the perfect beauty ; suddenly, he says, she will behold something marvellously beautiful, not beautiful by parts or by seasons as is the case with material beauty, but itself abiding true to itself for ever. This is very different from the tentative language about the absolute Idea with which the *Cratylus* closed. In both Dialogues in which the eternal Ideas first appear in this conspicuous position, they are associated with the thought of immortality. In the *Symposium* the association is comparatively little stressed. In the *Phaedo* it is the main theme of the Dialogue. The capacity to apprehend the eternal Ideas marks the soul off as

akin to the eternal world, which is its real home.

Just as the discovery of the differences between "knowledge" and "opinion" in the *Meno* had been immediately applied to problems of statesmanship in the *Gorgias*, so the new conviction concerning the eternal Ideas is made the basis of a philosophy of statesmanship in Plato's masterpiece—the *Republic*.

The *Phaedo* had asserted that the true method of explanation is teleology, that is to say, the exposition of the purpose which determines the thing being what it is. With the characteristic honesty which leads Plato always to offer an extreme instance, he now illustrates his meaning by desiring that someone should prove whether the world is round or flat by demonstrating that one or the other is better; for whichever is better, that it will be. (*Phaedo* 97 d, e.) In the *Republic* this principle becomes the metaphysical background of all his political thought. (The Ideas are all of them subordinate to a supreme Idea—the Idea of Good. The statesman, therefore, is to be so trained that he may apprehend this



supreme principle of the universe, and may then so govern his state that he will cause it to fulfil its true place in the universe which that supreme Idea controls.) The relation of his politics and ethics to his ultimate philosophy must concern us more precisely in the next lecture ; at present it will be best to illustrate, as far as we can, what he means by an Idea. (An Idea is the most real thing in the world ; it is that by conformity to which all physical objects have their qualities ; it is that in physical objects which the mind grasps ; and it is the perfect satisfaction of the mind that grasps it. To these four functions of the Idea we have four corresponding English words—Fact, Law, Meaning, and Truth.) Let us consider the Idea in each of these functions.

(a) The Idea of Justice which he is seeking in the *Republic* then becomes what we may call the Fact of Justice. When we use this phrase we do not simply refer to the just quality of just acts ; one might say, for example, “ the fact of the justice in the world makes the pursuit of selfish ends a fool’s game ” ; or we might say—“ the fact of generosity is itself the refutation of cynicism.” In each of

these two sentences what we should be insisting upon would not be the just quality, or the generous quality, of certain acts or powers, but the reality of the justice and of the generosity, and this particularly as throwing light upon the scheme of reality as a whole. If love is real, the whole world is different from what it would be if love were not real. How different, is a question still to be determined ; but such a phrase as " the fact of love," as of justice or generosity above, would only be used by someone who wished to imply certain inferences with regard to reality at large.

(b) We are all familiar with the conception of Laws of Nature, for example, the Law of Gravitation. But no one has ever experienced a Law of Nature ; they are grasped by the mind only. And there are some of them, as I am assured by students of science, which never can represent any actual facts ; and yet they are true. The Law of Gravitation itself, for example, only acts in co-operation with other laws or forces, *e.g.*, friction and the like. No one ever saw it at work in its purity. I remember once asking a scientific

friend about a Law which I believe is known as Boyle's Law of Gases; I asked whether all gases really behaved exactly as the Law described them, and he replied—"Oh no! none of them do; they would not be gases if they did." And yet the Law is a true Law; only something else about the gas prevents it from quite coming off; the particular never realises the idea. I must add that I know nothing concerning gases on my own account, and I always have a shrewd suspicion that the students of science spend their time in pulling the leg of the lay public.

(c) Meaning is something which the mind grasps on the occasion of certain experiences of the senses, but which the senses themselves can never reach. Physically regarded, the Plays of Shakespeare consist entirely of twenty-six curiously shaped black marks on white paper, arbitrarily arranged. Anyone who did not know English might look at the printer's ink for ever and ever without getting any further; but on the occasion of seeing this printer's ink arranged in curious shapes the mind of an English reader grasps the meaning of Shakespeare. The meaning then

is in some sense contained in the physical fact, but it is certainly not the same as the physical fact. So people ask with regard to the war—“What is the meaning of such things happening in God’s world?” The facts are certain enough; the meaning seems to be something other than facts.

(*d*) All this is most of all conspicuous in relation to Truth. When people ask for the real Truth about the world, or about life, they are wanting something beyond what their experience has given them; otherwise they would not ask, and there would be no philosophy and no art. The truth of the world must be the interpretation of experience, no doubt, but it is something which in our ordinary work-a-day experience we have not found.

When, then, we consider the four great functions of the Platonic Idea, we see easily enough that Plato had full warrant for insisting that it is something distinct from the physical reality which partially embodies it, and that it must be grasped by the mind alone and can never be reached by the senses.

The eternal Ideas which are thus apprehended by the intellect supply the object of

knowledge which could not be found in the perpetually changing material world. Concerning everything that belongs to this terrestrial existence we can never have real knowledge, but only opinion. In the *Meno* the difference between right opinion and knowledge had consisted in the addition to the former of its ground, but now the two have different spheres altogether, and it is only of the intellectual world that knowledge is possible. (The relation between the Ideas and their Particulars is at this stage described under three figures: (a) the Particular *participates* in the Idea (*Symposium*, 211 b); (b) The Idea is *present* in the Particular (*Phaedo*, 100 d); (c) The Particular *imitates* the Idea (*Republic*, X, 597, 598).) In this last book of the *Republic*, for the first time since the explicit formulation of the ideal theory of the *Symposium* and *Phaedo* we are confronted with (Ideas, not only of attributes such as the "beautiful," the "just," and the like, but of things such as a "bed."<sup>1</sup> Plato there speaks of the ideal bed which is the creation of God, and in imitation of which the

<sup>1</sup> But cf. the ideal shuttle in the *Cratylus*.

carpenter, or whoever else it may be, makes a material bed.) (We note in passing how all this is preparing for the line of thought familiar in the Epistle to the Hebrews, concerning the Heavenly Tabernacle and its earthly counterpart.) We shall see in a moment that this development, while inherent in the logic of the whole Ideal theory, none the less prepares the way for a great change which was to come over Plato's philosophy; but not yet. The *Phaedrus* belongs to the same date as the *Republic*; the great myth, which is its supreme glory, shows just that combination of philosophic grasp and poetic intuition which is the great characteristic of this period in Plato's work; but the Dialogue ends with an expression of despair concerning philosophic writing, and it would seem that after it there was a long pause.

The next Dialogue in date is probably the *Theætetus*, but it may be the *Parmenides*, which belongs to the same period. Let us take the latter first for convenience in exposition. In *Republic*, Book X, there had appeared the argument known as the τρίτος ἄνθρωπος argument. The argument was there

introduced to prove that each Idea is single, for if there were two, this would not be the real Idea, which would appear behind them as the principle of their unity; *e.g.*, if we suppose two ideal beds, we shall have to suppose another which gives to each its character, and this will be the real Idea. (597 c).

In the *Parmenides* this same argument is applied with ruinous effect to a certain form of the Ideal theory itself (132 a), for a third Idea is wanted connecting the Idea with its Particulars, and so *ad infinitum*. The same fate awaits the extension made in *Republic*, X, of the Ideal theory to physical objects. He asserts there the existence of the Ideal bed. But this, too, leads to absurdities. In the *Parmenides* (130 c) Socrates confesses perplexity as to whether there are Ideas of Man, Fire, Water, and so on, and himself urges that to maintain the existence of Ideal Hair or Ideal Mud would be to fall into an abyss of absurdity. We see then that two of the developments contained in *Republic*, X, supply the occasion for attack on a certain form of Ideal theory, which attack is developed in the *Parmenides*; moreover, I believe this form

to be one which Plato himself had at least provisionally held. Socrates, the representative of the Ideal theory, is here defeated in the argument. Surely it is legitimate to infer that the Ideal theory here refuted—refuted by Parmenides and upheld by Socrates—is meant to be that which in former Dialogues Socrates has so often maintained. Moreover, the precise point of attack in the *Parmenides* is the relation between the Ideas and Particulars, and especially three theories of this relation, namely, those of the *Symposium*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Republic*, mentioned above.

We are therefore not surprised that in the *Theætetus*, which belongs to the same period, a wholly new start is made with regard to the question—"What is knowledge?" Whether we call this the new Platonism, or the first genuine Platonism, will depend upon our views about the responsibility of Socrates or Plato for the doctrines mentioned hitherto. At any rate, there can be no doubt that, from this time onwards, Plato's thought makes a new start and follows a new line. The *Theætetus* begins with the question—"What is knowledge?" Its main contribution is to be found



in its assertion of certain known principles which qualify all experience (184–186). These are “being” and “not-being,” “likeness” and “un-likeness,” “identity” and “difference,” “unity” and “plurality.” It is maintained that inasmuch as these are applicable to the objects of all the several senses, they cannot be actually received through sensation. They are principles belonging to the mind itself, which is thus shown to be one and the same agent in all acts of sensation—seeing, hearing, smelling, and the like. It will be noticed that in this argument Plato has anticipated the Kantian theory of Categories and of the Unity of Apperception. It is curious that this great argument should have lain for all the centuries almost unheeded until Kant set it forth with far less lucidity than Plato.) The fact is that here, as so often, Plato’s grasp of the problem is so direct and complete, that men whose minds are less clear do not realise that he has handled it at all. When the argument is developed in a couple of hundred pages it begins to impress us; when its essence is stated in two pages we have not yet reached the problem by the time that

Plato has given a solution and passed on. While I am dealing with the capacity of Plato's insight to leap the centuries and anticipate the greatest advances of modern philosophy, I must allude to the section of the *Sophist*, where, reviving the problem of error from the *Theatetus* (188–200), he solves it by means of a doctrine of negation which anticipates what we often regard as Hegel's chief contribution to Logic (236–260).

We may now sum up the results of this discussion. Plato begins with the conviction that man possesses moral knowledge. This at once implies the existence of a permanent object of knowledge, at least in the moral sphere, but our ordinary experience does not itself give the ground for such knowledge; it is itself perpetually changing and it does not perfectly represent the principles of which it is the expression. The truth which corresponds to real knowledge is only found by deeper insight and wider apprehension than is obtainable at the level of ordinary experience. At the crown of the whole system as represented in the *Republic* is the Idea of Good; whether or not Plato thought of this as some-

thing personal when writing the *Republic*, there is no doubt that later on his supreme principle is the purpose or thought of a Living God. So he exclaims in the *Sophist* (248 e): "Can we ever be made to believe that motion, and life, and soul, and mind, are not present with perfect being? Can we imagine that being is devoid of life and mind, and exists in awful unmeaningness, an everlasting fixture?" Again, in the *Philebus* (30 c), we find him speaking of the "royal mind of Zeus." In the myth of the *Timæus*, written near the end of his life, he tells us that God made the world because He was free from all jealousy, and desired to share His own perfection as widely as possible (29 e). Perhaps the greatest height that he ever reaches is in the *Theætetus* (176 a, b), where he says that the wisdom of man is to fly from this world to the spiritual world, and this flight consists in becoming holy and just and good. "Evils cannot perish, Theodorus, for there must always be something opposing good, nor can they find their place among the gods, but they attend of necessity upon our mortal nature and this terrestrial sphere. We should

endeavour to flee from this region to that with all speed ; and by flight is meant a resemblance to God as far as is possible ; but to resemble Him is to become just and holy with wisdom. Indeed it is no easy task, my friend, to persuade men that the majority are wrong in the reason which they assign for fleeing wickedness, and pursuing virtue :—I mean, the avoidance of a bad reputation, or the acquirement of a good one ; this, as it seems to me, is an ‘ old wives’ tale,’ as the saying is. The truth we may put in this way. God is in no manner of way unjust but utterly and absolutely just, nor is there anything more like to Him than whosoever among men becomes as just as possible.”

## LECTURE II

### ETHICS AND POLITICS

PLATO starts, as we saw in the last Lecture, from Socrates' conviction of moral certainty. Morality, the sphere in which this certainty is found, is itself the science or art of social life. The principles which Socrates regards as unquestionably knowable are those which govern the relations between men within the system which is called Society, the City, or the State. Plato's whole thought on this subject is determined by his belief in human immortality. All the concerns of this world, public and private alike, are to be viewed in the light of eternity. One of the strongest instances of the effect which this produced is to be found in his account of the life that the true philosopher should live in this wretched world. "He will be like one," says Plato, "who

cowers behind a wall out of the storm of hail and sleet, counting himself happy if he can escape unspotted to the other world." (496 d, e.)<sup>1</sup> With this, of course, we must contrast the duty of the philosopher in the ideal State; there he will take his full part, deserting his contemplations to share in the government, because in that State he will be genuinely at home.

Politics for Plato becomes, in consequence of this perspective, entirely subordinate to ethics. The State is to be so fashioned that the influence of its organisation may create in the souls of its individual citizens that habit and proportion which is profitable for eternity. It is quite true that in the details of his political organisation Plato seems entirely to sacrifice the individual to society; but this, after all, is in the end for the individual's own sake. Justice in the State is a mere image of the true justice which is a condition of the individual soul (443 c). The true criterion of a Constitution is to be found by asking what training for eternity it affords. To make the

<sup>1</sup> All references in this Lecture are to the *Republic* unless otherwise specified.

matter clear, we may at this point contrast the view of Aristotle, who believed indeed in the eternity of spirit, but not at all in individual immortality. The result is that for him there is nothing beyond the life of society by which that life itself is to be judged. The test of a Constitution would seem to be its stability and capacity for resisting change; while the ideal life for man is something not socially serviceable in any high degree, so that ethics and politics fall right apart. Aristotle seems to care more for the individual, because he cares more for the individual's temporal concerns and freedom, but inasmuch as he prefers the good citizen to the good man when these two ideals fall apart, it is clear that for him the State comes first, and the individual second; while in Plato the individual as an eternal soul comes first, and it is only his temporal concerns that are sacrificed to the State—this sacrifice itself being demanded for the sake of the Individual's eternal welfare.

The ideal method which Plato would wish to apply in the sphere of politics and ethics is that which he outlines as actually at work in his ideal State. Kings are philosophers, but they

are ideal philosophers ; in other words, government is to be conducted by knowledge of the eternal truth. The philosopher king, who has seen the Idea of Good which is the governing principle of the whole universe, will so order his State that it may properly discharge its function as that function is determined by this supreme Idea. In modern or Christian terms, Plato's demand is for a State which shall be governed in all its details in accordance with the known purpose of God for His universe. This explains the curious, and at first sight baffling, extension of the area of inquiry in the *Republic*. He begins with the search for individual justice (Book I). He then remarks that justice is a term used of States, not only of Individuals, and we shall see it on a larger scale and therefore in a more easily recognisable form in the State than in the Individual. He therefore constructs his ideal State to embody the principle of justice. Alike in the State and Individual soul, justice turns out to consist in the true performance of its own function by each constituent element (Books II-V). But then this same law suddenly expands into the governing principle of the universe, for the



Idea of Good which allots to all other principles their sphere of operation is nothing but justice on a cosmic scale ; and so through individual morality, State organisation, and ultimate theology, he traces one principle. He has found it indeed by beginning with the individual, but it is only perfectly understood when it is grasped as cosmic ; consequently the philosopher king must be trained up to that apprehension, and in the light of it will administer the State.

From this it follows that the perfect constitution and the perfect science of politics alike require as their starting point and ground a knowledge of the Idea of Good ; but this knowledge Plato emphatically says that he does not himself possess (506 c-507 a). He believes that the most intellectually gifted of citizens, if trained according to his scheme of education, and under the influence of the whole moral atmosphere of his ideal State, would attain to this knowledge and govern their State in the light of it. Plato himself must fall back upon a provisional method ; and his method in ethics and politics is as a fact not metaphysical but psychological. A political

constitution, he says, both springs from the characters of the citizens, and then reproduces itself in those characters again (435 e, 544 d, 491 a-497 a, 547 b-580 a). If, for example, a State gives great honour to wealth, this can only be because the citizens regard wealth as of peculiar importance; but children born in the State which thus honours wealth will be led by its institutions to pay to wealth the same honour. A plutocracy is bad, not chiefly because it is unstable and liable to revolution, but because it rests upon a moral standard which is false and a symptom of disease in the soul. It is from this conviction that the whole analogy between the State and the Individual springs.

No doubt Plato constructs his State in such a way as to make the parallel as close as possible, but he shows in one or two casual phrases<sup>1</sup> that he is himself quite aware that the parallel is not actually so close as he has drawn it, and in two passages, widely separated, he insists that it is from the spiritual root, and not from the superficial resemblance, that the analogy springs (435 e, 544 d). There

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.*, εἰ ἄλλα ἄττα μεταξύ τυγχάνει ὄντα (443 e).

is a condition of the soul which is inherently good and healthy. A good constitution in the State is therefore one which springs from and perpetuates the good spiritual condition of the Individual. The excellence of this spiritual condition is entirely independent of the fact of the soul's eternity, but when that is brought into account everything other than spiritual excellence immediately becomes negligible. So the State is criticised from a rigidly moral point of view, and the ideal State is that which is at once the expression and the seed-plot of beautiful characters, and is, moreover, the best school for eternity.

We have already noticed that Aristotle seems to have no ultimate principle by which he criticises the State. His method is for the most part inductive; he considers what institutions there have been, and tries to infer from their merits and defects in working what is the best available. Plato, looking into human nature with the thought of immortality always present to him, imagines a State which should be the perfectly congruous home of the perfect character. No doubt by the end of Book IX this has become a city in

Heaven, which he despairs of realising completely upon earth ; but it is one upon which a man may gaze and fashion the constitution within his own soul after its pattern. In a similar way, with regard to individual ethics we find that Aristotle is in the end of the day purely intuitionist ; there are many acts which are to be done merely because to do them is noble, and to shirk them is base. At one time we had thought that he was going to give us the principle which determines nobility and baseness, when he tells us that virtue lies in a mean between two extremes, and that this mean is determined by that principle which the wise man (*φρόνιμος*) would apply. But when we ask who is the wise man we are only told that it is he who applies the right principle. For practical purposes this works well enough. We do know as a fact the kind of man whose moral advice we value in cases of perplexity. But as science the position is plainly intolerable ; we have not been brought any nearer to understanding why a given act is right. Plato is intuitionist, as every man must be, about the end ; but there is only one end, which is justice. (With regard to all particular

actions and principles Plato is ruthlessly utilitarian: the useful is noble, and the harmful is base (457 b). The general objection to a utilitarian criticism of morals is not really that it justifies moral action by an end beyond itself, but that the end which it proposes is pleasure. It is the hedonism of Bentham and Mill, not their utilitarianism, that is the real flaw. With regard to such questions as the relation of the sexes most men need to fall back either upon prejudice or intuition; the two are not always easy to distinguish. Bentham would consider what arrangement most conduces to the greatest happiness of the greatest number, and interprets happiness in terms of pleasure. Plato will be equally utilitarian; the arrangements and conventions must be such as most effectively serve the highest good; but for him the highest good is by no means pleasure—it is justice. And here we may parenthetically remark that his whole system fails just in proportion as justice itself falls short of Love. About the end, if there be an end, man must be intuitionist, and therefore Plato does not try to justify his ideal man or his ideal State.

He draws the picture and says—Do you like it or not? But once that ideal is accepted as the end, everything else falls into place as means to that end. He is very near that interpretation of morality which says that to love God and to love man is the whole of the moral law, and that all particular actions or departmental principles are to be determined as love to God and man on each occasion prompt. For this reason Plato is, of course, rather shocking to respectability, and no doubt there is in his work a lack of reverence for the authority of tradition. But the tradition of civilisation in his time was still very short; the Greeks, whose life is symbolised by their walled cities, knew that barbarism lay all about them and that they were only just raised above it. They did not look back to two thousand years of history in a society which they believed to be inspired, even though the treasure be in earthen vessels. And so Plato is able practically to ignore all conventions, and try to think out the whole problem for himself. [Of course his solution will not work. His proposed abolition of the family, his communism in husbands, wives,

and children, however wisely regulated and however strictly conducted, ignores elementary facts in human nature, and would result in making men more selfish, not, as he hoped, more self-devoted; moreover, it postulates an understanding by the rulers of the intimate characters of their subjects such as no philosopher king, nor anyone less than Divine, could ever have. But then the honesty and thoroughness of the attempt make his failure more instructive than the success of most other men, here as in so many departments of his work. At least his method is one by which a complete systematic grasp of the moral life of man, whether individual as in ethics, or corporate as in politics, is possible.]

We now turn to the actual analogy between the State and the Individual which is the most familiar feature of the *Republic*. It is really based upon an analysis of the human soul, though Plato develops the outline of his Constitution first, and only discovers the psychological parallel afterwards. Let us therefore change his order and take first the analysis of the Soul.

Its governing principle is simply this.

There are three primary relations in which a man may stand to other men, and there are only three. He may ignore them, he may compete with them, and he may co-operate with them. No doubt these three can be combined in an infinite variety of ways. For example, in a game of football the two teams co-operate in creating the enjoyment of the game, but the enjoyment depends upon the competition between them, for if one side does not play up there is no fun. Consequently, within the whole co-operative system of the game there is a competitive element which is vital to it. But again in this competition each team co-operates; to be a good individual player is to be good in co-operation; the selfish player, however brilliant, is always an inferior player. But there may in either team be some wretched individual who plays, not for the sake of the game, but for the sake of exercise, and so far as motive is concerned he has no regard to other persons at all, whether in the way of competition or co-operation; he takes advantage of this competitive co-operative activity to satisfy a purely self-regarding desire. This illustrates



the way in which by being mixed together the three primary relations may be concealed from anything but rather close observation. It remains true, however, that one or other of these three relations must be present between any two men existing in the same universe, while all may of course exist together.

The elementary desires pay no attention to other persons. When I am hungry I need food, when I am thirsty I need drink.<sup>1</sup> Here there is no relation to other people implied at all. In a vicious social system it may be true that I can only get my food by virtually robbing someone else of it, and so far I become involved in competition; or like Sir Philip Sidney, I may when thirsty forgo satisfaction

<sup>1</sup> In order to insist on our thinking of the desires in their simplicity, Plato introduces a long section (437 b-439 c) to explain that each desire is of an object and that the object is only qualified if the desire is. Thirst is desire for drink; if I am very thirsty I desire much drink; if I am hot and thirsty I desire a cold drink; if I am cold and thirsty I desire a hot drink. Will it be believed that some German critics, thinking that the qualification should be the same on both sides of the relation, alter the MS. and make Plato say that if I am hot and thirsty I desire a hot drink and if I am cold and thirsty I desire a cold drink? One wonders if even a German professor was ever known to run into a shop out of a blizzard and exclaim, "I am frozen to death; give me an iced lemon squash."

of my thirst for the sake of another, but this is not done in so far as I am thirsty, but in so far as I am also generous. The life of desire then is purely self-regarding, and the function of the desires is simply to maintain the basis of life. But the separate desires are not only entirely void of relation to other persons, but they are atomistic in themselves. The desire for food may be quite isolated from the real nature of the whole self, so may the desire for drink. In fact, these desires may easily conflict with the real good of the whole person, or even with his deliberate purpose, so that by indulging in them a man may wreck both himself and the purpose of his life. They are self-regarding, but do not attain to the level of self-respect.

This is reached by the second division of the Soul—*θυμός*, which we may perhaps represent in English by the word “spirit,” understood in that sense which it bears in the phrase—“A man of spirit,” or by the word “devil” in the sense which it bears when we say of someone—“He has no devil in him.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is possible that a very profound philosophy of evil lurks in this expression, with its apparent recognition of the value of qualities clearly evil if held in proper subordination.

*θυμὸς* does regard the self as a whole in contrast with the desires which ignore the whole that they constitute ; but it sees the man always in distinction from, and in competition with, other men. Its leading word is Honour, and perhaps its temper is best expressed in the words attributed by Blougram to Gigadibs :  
“ Best be yourself, imperial, plain and true.” ✓

Above this stands reason, whose function it is to realise the self as a member of the community, and therefore to perform those tasks which fall to it as such a member ; in other words, it is co-operative.

Two things are clear about this scheme. In the first place there is a real function for each of the elements of the soul in the perfect life. If the desires are not satisfied life will cease altogether ; *θυμὸς* will play its part in protecting reason against any attempt of desires to go beyond their true province or against such oppression by other men as might deprive the man of scope for the service he is qualified to render ; for the man who has once learned that he is essentially a member of a community will only satisfy his self-

respect, will only gain such honour as he cares to have, by living up to his membership. Consequently, if reason is supreme there is a place found for the other elements; but if *θυμὸς* is supreme reason is given no place; and if desire is supreme then neither reason nor *θυμὸς* can find a place.

Secondly, we have obviously here the basis of three types of society: anarchism, individualism, and socialism in its true and philosophical sense. Before, however, passing on to this, it may be worth while to deal with the complaint that Plato seems to personify the different elements in the Soul, and to ignore its unity. After all, it is one man who has desires and ambitions and duties. That, of course, is quite true, and Plato was as well aware as anybody else of the fundamental unity of the Soul; so he says in the *Theætetus* (184 d) that it is ridiculous to regard the various faculties as sitting side by side in the Soul like the Greek warriors in the Trojan horse. But here he is concerned with personality as exhibited in action, and everyone is aware that his character as exhibited in action is a variable thing. There are days when desires

seem to run riot ; there are periods when he is conscious of his dignity and is liable to act with haughtiness ; there are other times when he is really concerned to render the kind of service that his gifts make him fit to render. The task of moral training cannot be better expressed than in the phrase which governs Plato's thinking at this point : " Out of many to become one " (443 e) that is, to gather up all the different impulses and instincts and perceptions, and bind them into one whole which shall be harmonious both with itself and with its neighbours in the social fabric.

The State, according to Plato, has three main divisions corresponding to the three main divisions of the Soul. The bulk of the population will always be concerned with ministering to the Desires, that is to say, in the production of food, clothing, houses, and everything else necessary to the bodily life of man. But the State might need to defend itself, and therefore a certain number of citizens in whom the spirited element is most conspicuous will be set apart as its guardians, and again from among these those whose rational faculty is greatest will be selected for training

as rulers. These three classes provide the skeleton which is necessary to the existence of a State, but inasmuch as the life of desire goes far beyond mere maintenance of physical existence, there will also be those who minister to what he calls the unnecessary passions. These will include the whole range of artists, from those concerned with the fine arts to those who make an art of what can be treated as bare necessity, such as high-class cooks, etc. The multiplication of these he considers will also involve a considerable increase in the number of doctors. As he pictures this extension of his primary State or City of Pigs, he says that an extension of territory will be necessary for the accommodation of these adjuncts, and that this is the original reason for the institution of soldiers; and he takes occasion at this point to affirm, like St. James, that the origin of war is that "ye lust and have not." Still it is rather for defence than for aggression that the military class is really required, and perhaps also because Plato, who dreamt of practical reforms as well as ultimate ideals, desired that his ideal State should be actually founded and become the leader of Greek

civilisation against Persian barbarism (369 b-376 c ; 469 b-471 c).

Justice, whether in the Soul or in the State, consists in the doing by each element of just that which it is fitted to do. Wisdom resides in the rational faculty alone, and the wisdom of the State in its ruling class. Courage resides in the spirited element and the military class. Temperance consists in each of the three elements or classes refraining from interference in the affairs of one another. Justice is the positive side of the same virtue, and consists in the right performance by each element or class of its own function. There must be in the State perfect equality of opportunity, and loyalty is always to be primarily given to the whole community. It is for the second of these objects that he desires to abolish the family—whether in the two higher classes or in all the State, for this point is not made clear. He will have no narrower loyalty that may hinder complete devotion to the whole State. No doubt he is here psychologically wrong. It is only through learning loyalty in the smaller society, to which the child can recognise its obligation, that we become capable of the

wider loyalty ; but, of course, Plato has abundant basis in experience for saying that very often the narrower loyalty in fact prevents a true loyalty to the larger unit. Men do often put their family before their country, perhaps not usually in war, but very generally in peace, and a Christian must add that nearly all men put their country before humanity and the Kingdom of God. The abolition of the family also secures incidentally equality of opportunity. Children are all brought up under the same influence and given the same chances, and they are to be allotted by the rulers to that class for which their faculties fit them. The child of a philosopher-king who is not distinguished either for courage or wisdom will go into the class of the craftsmen ; and the child of the craftsman may become a philosopher-king (414 b-415 d ; 432 b-434 c ; 443 b-444 a ; 457 b-466 d).

The ideal State then is one in which the true constitution of the Soul is exemplified on the larger scale of political organisation (443c). And this is made clearer by the account which Plato gives of cities which fall short of the ideal. This account is given in



a semi-mythical form as though it represented actual history, but the procedure is logical and not historical, and represents the giving of supreme power to various elements in human nature other than reason in a downward series. He imagines that his State has been founded; but if so it will come under the general law that all which has growth must also suffer decay (546 a). It is free from the seeds of decay within itself, and therefore the moment when the decay sets in must be determined by something outside itself. He suggests in solemn language that there is a geometric or earth-measuring number whose completion will inevitably initiate decay. The controversy, that rages round the question what exactly this number is, is itself enough to show that it was never very specially meant to be any number in particular; that Plato knew it for such we shall find evidence a little later; no doubt it was intended for a *Magnus Annus* of some sort.

The first stage in decay is where *θυμὸς* becomes supreme in the soul and the military class in the State. Such a city was Sparta in Plato's time; such a State perhaps is

Prussia, according to its own estimate of itself, in the modern world. Here the supreme concern is glory for the State and honour for the Individual—honour interpreted, not as the maintenance of moral integrity, but as the maintenance of reputation, the kind of honour, in fact, that takes offence at an insult. There is still self-respect and therefore self-control, but the general spirit is aggressive and disagreeable. In the next stage the unnecessary passions, for example the passion for wealth, have won supremacy in the Soul, and the political constitution becomes an oligarchy, or as we should say plutocracy. Here too there is some self-control, because for the making of money a certain restraint upon the more violent passions and a certain concentration of purpose are needed; but the constitution, whether of the Soul or of the State, is now precarious; both political power and social position are in the hands of a few men who are doing nothing whatever to deserve them. The soldier-leaders of a timocracy are after all serving the State and offering their lives for it; the plutocrat does nothing of the kind. There is no principle of any sort to

justify his position, and consequently the great mass of citizens are ready to rise against him. Similarly, in the Soul the unnecessary desires can give no reason to the more elementary passions why they should be kept in check. This is represented in Plato's mythical story, by the suggestion that as the oligarchical man is the son of a timocratic man, so for his own son he has a democratic man. He is unable to impart to his son the principles which have kept him at least respectable, because these principles have no rational basis ; and so in the son all passions run riot together, while in the democratic State citizens claim the right to do everything ; for by democracy Plato means mob-rule. The representative system had not been invented, though it is true that the Athenians elected their chief executive officers. The great vices of democracy as he understands it arise from the unwillingness of anyone to recognise the superiority of anyone else, in any department whatever. It is an attempt at equality, not only of opportunity, but of influence and power. And so he says it is a kind of bazaar of constitutions, which acts upon different prin-

ciples almost every day; and the corresponding man is one in whom now this passion, now that, is uppermost. One day he may choose to be a profligate, another day he may choose to be an artist, another day he may choose to govern the State or lead an army. He may possibly be very clever and attractive, but there is no constancy about him and no one can trust him. There is only one stage worse; that is where in the Soul a single violent passion has won control over all the rest, and the corresponding State is one where a single citizen—not himself fitted for rule—holds all the power. The philosopher-king is a despot, who governs for the sake of the subjects, as reason is a despot governing the Soul for its fullest good. The tyrant is a despot who governs for the sake of himself, as the tyrannical man is one whose soul is under the oppression of one of its own parts which is unfit to rule. Worst and most miserable of all things is that tyrannical man who has attained the position of tyrant in a State. For here the single violent passion which governs his soul forces all the resources of the State into its service. For the description

of such a man Plato says we must go to one who has lived in the house of such a tyrant, and has himself the insight to realise the facts. He is, of course, thinking of his own experience in the court of Dionysius of Syracuse (547 c-580 a).

At the close of this series of States and Individuals we have another Pythagorean number, and its quality throws light on the former. He says that from the philosopher-king to the oligarch is 3 ; from the oligarch to the tyrant is 3 ; if we multiply these together we get 9, but we want a solid result ; so we cube it ; and the cube of 9 is 729 ; and this is very nearly, but not quite, twice the number of days in a year ; so the philosopher-king is happier than the tyrant every day and every night of his life. Plato counts one stage twice over ; he multiplies when he ought to add ; he cubes the product for no reason at all ; and the result is a number which is nearly but not quite one to which a wholly fantastic significance could be given. Plainly the whole thing is a satire on the humbug of mystical numbers, but I need not add that the German commentators are seriously exercised as to the

rationale of the philosopher's procedure (587 b-588 a).

I have deliberately given the outline of the ideal State and the process of decay from the ideal to tyranny before stating how it is that in the *Republic* the ideal State ever came to be constructed. This is because the argument of the first Book, and even of the first part of Book II, usually strikes people at first as being singularly slight and inconclusive. It is only when read in the light of what comes afterwards that its real significance is appreciated; for the significance is first and foremost dramatic and not logical. Kephalus, the devout old man, maintains that for a man who is just and who is provided with the means of rendering his duty to gods and men death has no terrors. Socrates at once asks him what is this quality of justice which saves a man from the fear of death. But Kephalus does not answer; he hands over the argument to his son and himself goes out smiling to offer sacrifice. The simple faith of his serene old age need not be disturbed (327 a-331 d). His son Polemarchus is a well-brought-up young man, but he has to live in a world where

questions are being asked that were not common when Kephalus was young, and unless he can give a reason for the hope that is in him he is likely to be driven into cynicism and perhaps from that to the abandonment of morality even in practice. Polemarchus begins by quoting Simonides; he appeals, in fact, to authority. Justice is to render to each his due. This, as a matter of fact, is true enough, though it is always a superficial statement; but Polemarchus attaches no particular meaning to it; he has not thought it out, and so, as Socrates debates the question, he is reduced to complete perplexity. It is important to notice that one of the confusions that Socrates introduces arises from the question—What is the sphere or department of justice? Every other art has its own department; medicine is the art of healing, cookery the art of cooking, and so on. What is the sphere of justice corresponding to these two? And no sphere is discoverable. The attempt to allot one results by a process of ingenious argument in the view that justice is itself a special department of the art of stealing. The whole point of this argument,

of course, is the error of its starting-place. Justice has no special department because all life is its department, and we presume sufficient justice in our doctor or our cook to safeguard us against being poisoned by them. As soon as a special department is sought there is none to be found, and justice becomes useful only in uselessness (331 e-336 a).

The conventional beliefs of the well-brought-up young man have broken down; he is succeeded by Thrasymachus, the clever but superficial cynic. In the dialogue these two phases must be represented by two persons, but in fact they are two stages in mental growth. Everyone who has watched undergraduates passing through their University course has seen Polemarchus change into Thrasymachus, generally I think about the beginning of the second year, in a score of instances. According to Thrasymachus all morality is a convention, and on the whole a bad one. The true principle of life is the interest of the stronger; the weak must go to the wall; it is just that the strong should control them or trample on them. But Thrasymachus himself cannot defend this position



in the end, for it really involves in practice that the ruler of the State must be infallible. What is to happen if he enacts something which is contrary to his own interest—that is, the interest of the stronger? Is the subject, or weaker, to serve what is the interest of the stronger, or what the stronger thinks to be his interest? No coherent answer can be given to this question, and so cynicism itself also breaks down (336 b–354 c). In the same way, the philosophy of Nietzsche, which is Thrasy-machus turned into poetry, involves either the same incoherence or else a perpetual state of anarchy while the superman is being discovered.

In the process of this purely dialectical argument Socrates has established three points which stand firm. One is that it can never be just to inflict an injury, for to injure is to make worse, and it is contradictory to say that justice can make a man worse, *i.e.*, more unjust. It may or may not be right to inflict pain; but it will only be right to inflict pain when it is inflicted as a medicine. Consequently, Polemarchus' paraphrase of Simonides, that we should benefit friends and injure enemies, must be rejected. The just man will

2 - not injure his enemies in any real sense of the word injury (335 b-d). The second principle is that rulers as such are concerned not with themselves but with their subjects; just as the shepherd *quâ* shepherd is concerned, not with himself, but with the sheep. If he is paid for it and if he only tends the sheep for pay, he does all that as a money-maker and not as a shepherd; but the duty of a shepherd is not to make money but to care for the sheep (341 a-347 a). The third principle is that Justice is a principle of union and therefore of strength, while Injustice is a principle of disunion and therefore of weakness. Even a gang of robbers, if it is to be effective in villainy, must be held together by its members' respect for one another's rights. Justice is therefore already seen to be what in the Ideal State it explicitly becomes—the principle of co-operation (348 a-352 d).<sup>1</sup>

Conventional beliefs have broken down, and

<sup>1</sup> The closing argument of the Book (352 d-354 c) is in its place a quibble on the two senses of "live well"—*sc.* live agreeably and live virtuously. The identity of these two is established, and the argument retrospectively justified, by subsequent developments.

cynicism has broken down; the argument is now taken up by Glauco and Adeimantus, who are Plato's two brothers, and in whom he has embodied the two main streams of his philosophic ardour. [ Glauco is the uncompromising idealist and Adeimantus the practical reformer, and from now to the end of the dialogue Glauco is always the interlocutor in the more ideal passages, and Adeimantus in the more practical. Indeed Adeimantus several times breaks in when the argument seems to be becoming too idealist and remote from facts, recalling Socrates to the question—What can we actually do? (*e.g.*, 362 d, 449 b, 487 b). Glauco now undertakes to revive the argument of Thrasymachus, not because he believes in it, but because he thinks Socrates' refutation up till now inadequate, and so he will state the argument as forcibly as he can in the hope that he may hear Socrates refute its strongest claims. The argument which he advances is this. All men are by nature selfish. If left to themselves they would live in what Hobbes describes as the state of nature, wherein the life of man is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." As soon as anyone

possesses anything he finds all the rest against him, and so there is security for nobody. Consequently men have made a convention neither to commit nor suffer injury. What would be best for each, namely, to commit injury with impunity, is out of reach. It is worth while to recognise the rights of others in order to secure one's own ; morality is just the compromise arrived at by selfish men, in order that through setting a certain limit upon their selfishness they may secure a considerable measure of selfish enjoyment. If men could be sure of always escaping detection by having, for example, the power to become invisible at will, no one's conscience would be strong enough to stand the strain, and men would indulge in every sort of pleasure—wholesome and horrible. On the other hand, if there should appear in the world a man perfectly righteous and caring for righteousness for its own sake, he would appear to others to be an assailant of morality because he challenged their own moral habits, and they would scourge and crucify him.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *μαστιγώσεται . . . . τελευτῶν πάντα κακὰ παθὼν ἀνασχινδύλευθήσεται* (361 e).

And so morality itself is, in fact, not the supreme good, but the lesser of two evils, and if any man can ignore it and be sure of impunity he will do so, and will be wise in doing so (358 e-362 c).

Here Adeimantus takes up the tale. Not only, he says, do men believe what Glauco has just said, but you cannot expect them to believe anything else when they are educated as they are; for the poets, who are our only authority for believing in the gods, themselves represent them as having nothing in particular to do with righteousness; their example is disastrous to the morality of man; and there are quack-priests in the world ready to offer absolutions and perform requiems by means of which, at a trifling cost, men may escape the penalties of their misdeeds. So the part of a wise man, as it would seem, is to commit robbery and offer sacrifice out of the proceeds; so he will make the best of both worlds (362 d-367 e).

It is in answer to the two brothers that Plato sketches the ideal State. Society would arise if men were simply and entirely selfish, as Glauco has said; but Society would also

arise if men were wholly free from selfishness, for men have different gifts, and each needs the gifts of all ; and so, apart from all competition or selfishness, men would as a matter of fact co-operate according to some ordered scheme. The ideal State is society as it would be if men were thus wholly free from selfishness. Actually society no doubt rests upon both principles at once. In so far as it is represented by the police and the law courts, Glauco's theory is true ; and most of us would have to confess that if the penal sanctions of morality were all abolished, our own standard of conduct would be likely in one respect or another to decline. But there is also in actual society an immense element of fellowship and co-operation ; and political progress has, in fact, consisted in the development of the element of fellowship as against the element of mutual antagonism ; that is to say, in the development from society as Glauco represents it, towards the ideal State which Socrates constructs.

Justice as the governing principle of the ideal State is, as we have seen, the requiring from each man of the service he is fitted to

render. No doubt in abstract logic this works out as identical with justice, as Polemarchus following Simonides defined it—the rendering to each his due. For rights and duties are correlative terms; my neighbour's duties are constituted by my rights, and my duties by his rights. But in practice the two are very different. In the first place, it is much easier for a man to determine whether he is doing his utmost for society than to determine what is really due (that is, what will be truly beneficial) to any given individual. If all men will solve their own problem of doing their very best, the other problem will have solved itself. But even more important than this is the distinction in moral atmosphere. Polemarchus' phrase lays all the emphasis on rights, and would suggest a society of persons, each claiming his just rights. Socrates' definition lays the emphasis on duties, and suggests a society of persons eager to render each his just meed of service. Perhaps there is nothing so important for our modern democracy as to learn this transference of emphasis from rights to duties.

Glauco, then, is answered by the construc-

tion of the Ideal State. Morality as we know it is very often adopted as a mere compromise ; but it need not be so ; and morality in its own nature and when loved for its own sake turns out to be the highest good for men.

The answer to Adeimantus follows similar lines. Contemporary education is very apt to be as bad as he says it is ; but it is capable of reform ; and we can conceive a type of education which will be a real training in morality. The governing principle in Plato's educational scheme is that character must be moulded before the intellect is trained. The primary business of elementary education is so to mould the impulses and instincts that the child will spontaneously love and hate the right things. The child is to be brought up in such surroundings as will make goodness attractive. It must have no personal experience of evil at all. When it meets with evil in later life it will recognise it by the jarring discord between it and the character that its early environment has moulded. Morality here differs from Science. It may be a good thing that a doctor should have had experience of disease, for he heals body with



mind, and the bodily disease may not damage his mind. But the judge must not have experienced moral evil in his own soul, for he has to heal soul with soul. We cannot make moral experiments, for to introduce evil into the soul vitiates the very faculty by which we afterwards pronounce judgment (408 d–409 d). There is a danger that the soul itself may become possessed by a lie, and then it can no more grasp the truth, even if it gazes on it, than a warped mirror can accurately reflect what is before it (382 a and b). To train the intellect if the character is unsound may only enable a man to be successful in his villainy ; this will be bad for society but also for himself, for it will make him content with vice (376 e–403 c).

Plato is under no illusion with regard to the greatness of the moral task. He knows that virtue is only attained at great cost and effort. The apparent sacrifice of the individual to the State in Book V is the measure of his apprehension of the difficulties in the way. Perhaps, however, the parable in Book IX represents the matter still more forcibly. He says that we must fashion in our minds a

composite image. First there shall be a many-headed monster which represents the life of desire, and then smaller, but very formidable, a lion, representing the element of self-assertion or *θυμὸς*, and lastly, far smaller than this, a man representing the rational principle. All of these we must enclose in the outward form of a man. That is human nature; and the moral task consists in reducing the many-headed monster into complete subordination to the tiny man, and forming an alliance between the man and the lion on terms which the man dictates. The whole scheme of the Ideal State, not only as regards Education, but also in the principles of its political constitution, is intended to facilitate the performance of this task, the development of the humanity in man (588 c-592 b).

It may perhaps be asked—What has become of free-will? Is it ignored? Perhaps we must answer that for practical purposes it is ignored. But then surely we must add that all political discussion is bound to ignore it. Environment does, to an immense extent at least, determine character, and when we are discussing what we can do to form the char-

acters of citizens, we must leave out of sight the possibility that some individuals may make the most adverse circumstances material for their moral achievement. We should indeed remember (and it may fairly be held that Plato forgets) the fact that the deepest springs of human nature can only be appealed to through something which arouses sympathy. Plato has this fully in mind in his educational scheme, but when he comes to the Constitution he seems to leave it out of sight. The ultimate problem of free-will, however, is fully present to his mind. In the myth with which the Dialogue closes, the souls of men in the other world are represented as being brought before the throne of Necessity to choose the genius which shall govern their life after reincarnation. The various lots are set out before them, and a voice is heard proclaiming that each must choose for himself; "the responsibility is with the chooser—God is blameless."<sup>1</sup> Taken as mere prose, this seems to place the act of free-will in a moment previous to birth, after which it would seem that we merely work out the result of the

<sup>1</sup> *αἰτία ἐλομένων· θεὸς ἀναίτιος.* (617 e.)

choice then made ; indeed it is because of that choice that philosophy is represented as so supremely important. A man who has lived well, but without Reason, will indeed depart undefiled to the other world and for the thousand years of pilgrimage there will enjoy the rewards of his virtue ; but on having to choose his lot for a future life upon earth he may make terrible mistakes through not knowing the real standards of value ; and so he may return to earth and live the life of a villain, and depart again to the other world, needing this time the purification of its punishments.

Perhaps at this point one may remark that these punishments for Plato are all to be remedial so long as remedy is possible ; but there is, he thinks, a condition of soul which is incurable ; and then, as no good can be made out of the man for himself, he may still be turned to some good through being used as a warning to others. Such was Ardiæus the Great ; he, at the end of a life of tyranny, had died a thousand years before the vision was seen. The souls who had passed through this world with him inquire, as they prepare for reincarnation, where the great tyrant is ;

there are some who answer that they had seen him emerge from the pit, but before he reached its mouth men of fierce and fiery countenance seized him and hurled him back. There is in Plato's theology a Hell for those who have passed beyond the reach of all spiritual healing, but only for them.

But all of this is part of a myth ; it is all of it poetry, not science. It signifies the infinite and eternal significance of the moral choice, and also the truth that somehow or other man is responsible, though God is supreme ; and there it is left. The problem of free-will, as we know it, is not one which Plato has made the subject of definite philosophical discussion.

The last paragraphs make it clear that in Plato's view there are indeed rewards for justice, and punishments for injustice ; but these are only introduced at the very end and after justice has been pronounced the best life for man. It had been demanded by Glauco (361 c, d) that this should be demonstrated without any regard to the consequences of justice ; and the Ideal State was conceived and the philosopher-king described, to meet that demand of Glauco. For indeed the

highest good can never be justified. To justify is to approve as righteous by reference to some external standard ; righteousness itself, therefore, which constitutes the standard, cannot be justified ; we can only describe it and ask—Do you like it or not ? In the passage concerning the Idea of Good Glauco suggests that by this perhaps Socrates means Pleasure ; but the suggestion is repudiated in words which imply that it is blasphemy (509 a). Nor is the highest good Happiness in any possible sense of that word, for this still subordinates what is right to what is agreeable. The highest good is Justice itself—but Justice and not Love.

Plato never took that step which seems to us to be so easy for him ; in the supreme moment he is terribly stern ; pleasure positively terrifies him ; it is the one subject about which he seems to be the victim of prejudice. Until Christ came, every image of God was an idol ; until Christ died, every conception of the Divine Love was soft and sentimental, unless it were balanced, as we see it balanced in the prophets, by an element of sternness which may be logically incompat-

ible with the other, but is morally necessary. Forgiveness of sins is demoralising, unless it is offered at an overwhelming cost to the pardoner. If God merely says "Never mind," that is an insult to the better kind of man and an encouragement to the worse kind. But when God has set forth the tremendous cost at which alone He can forgive, everything is changed. There is nothing so humbling as that one's friend should say—"You have betrayed me, and no words can express the pain it caused; but it shall not disturb our friendship." There is nothing in that demoralising, nor anything that can encourage the basest. But this revelation had not yet been given, and we see Plato lacking just the one element that would have made his philosophy coherent and his morality complete. He somewhat resembles Ezekiel, one of the tenderest of all the prophets, who seems to shrink in a kind of horror from allowing that God can be moved by pity for men. The word of the Lord, as he hears it, promises acts of compassion, but always goes on to say that these will be done, not for the sake of men, but for the glory of the Lord who does them;

the prophet who demands unselfishness in men, represents God as altogether self-occupied, because he dare not commit himself to the doctrine of Divine Love, which must be blasphemous if it is not true. So Plato leaves us at the last strangely cold. We do not want to live in his Ideal State ; it would be dull and mechanical. We do want to feel the emotions of pity and tenderness which he regards as weakness. [His absolute morality is in the end repellent, because the revelation which alone can give it attractive power had not yet been granted to men.]



## LECTURE III

### PLATO AND CHRISTIANITY

THE aim of this Lecture is to suggest a number of points in which Plato approaches or prepares for the Christian interpretation of life. We have already seen that the whole of his moral and political philosophy is constructed against the background of a belief in human immortality. No doubt this belief as it arose among the Pharisees had a more direct influence upon primitive Christian thought, but it has often been pointed out that the existence of the Greek conception of immortality was one of the main factors enabling the Church to survive the disappointment due to the postponement of the Second Coming. The Jewish form of the belief had been, at least to a considerable extent, materialistic, as is shown by the question of the

Sadducees. The Resurrection of the body in a very literal sense was anticipated. But Christians who had died in the faith were becoming very many and their bodies were undergoing the ordinary process of corruption. The Resurrection hope, as Pharisaism had tended to encourage it, was becoming almost untenable. It would appear that in the Church of Corinth there was a party who called themselves the "Spirituals," who maintained a belief in purely spiritual immortality and were liable in consequence to ignore the body and all morality that is immediately concerned with the body. Against them St. Paul has to strive, but he definitely concedes that the crude form of the Pharisaic hope must be abandoned. "I admit this point," he says (for that is the force of the Greek words), "that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God."<sup>1</sup> In his own earlier writings he had spoken in terms at least suggestive of a crudely physical resurrection, but in his later works the terms appropriate to the Greek view become more frequent. To die is now apparently forthwith to be at

<sup>1</sup> I Cor. xv, 50.

home with the Lord.<sup>1</sup> (Plato cannot, indeed, be given the credit for the whole of the Greek doctrine of immortality, but his teaching in this matter was of immense importance.) Let us then follow out the steps of his main arguments on the subject.

It would appear from the *Apology* that Socrates was an agnostic on this subject; to die may be to pass to a better life or it may be to pass into nothingness; he is only sure it cannot be a passage to anything evil, for "it is not possible that evil should happen to a good man in life or in death, nor is his welfare neglected by the gods" (40 c-41 d). In the *Phaedo*, however, the doctrine of immortality is asserted and defended. Let us attend to the various arguments which Plato advances on behalf of it. (1) The first is this: (All things that have opposites are generated out of those opposites; greater from less, sleep from waking, death from life, and—we may infer by analogy—life from death; our souls therefore must have existed in Hades before our birth in order to be born into life (70 d-72 d). (In passing we notice that Plato thus

<sup>1</sup> II Cor. v, 8.

assumes life before birth and life after death to stand and fall together ; what he is really concerned with is the capacity of the soul to exist independently of the body.) This rather unconvincing argument from analogy is reinforced by the insistence that if there is no return from death to life, then, inasmuch as all that lives passes into death, a time must come when life is extinct and the whole universe is dead, which Plato regards as inconceivable (72 b, c). (Here we must note that the permanence of life is assumed, but, still more important, the possibility of new creation is not even contemplated ; in the *Republic* it is even more definitely excluded (611 a)).

(2) The second argument is purely Platonic ; it is concerned with his doctrine that knowledge is Recollection. We never saw perfect equality or perfect straightness ; yet we have the thought of them. How did we acquire it ? It must be because we saw them in a life before birth, and the approximately straight lines, the approximately equal magnitudes, which we see in this physical world, revive the recollection of the ideal which before birth we had apprehended. So the soul must

have existed before birth to have received that apprehension (72 d–77 a). “But this does not prove that the soul continues to exist after death.” Yes it does, if we combine it with what was said above about the generation of opposites from opposites (77 c–77 d).

(3) A brief dialectical argument is here introduced to controvert the notion that the soul may at death be dissolved into its parts. The soul is simple, and therefore indissoluble. But Plato’s own grasp of the unity of the soul was at this date less complete and less well grounded than in later times (77 e–81 c).

(4) That Plato attached only small importance to this argument is shown by the fact that Cebes, one of the interlocutors, admits that Socrates has proved the soul to be longer-lived than the body, but not that it is eternal; and unless it is eternal, it may perish at any occasion of death, even though it has previously survived both death and birth many times, and indeed may in any one life or period of incarnation perish before its body—just as a man outlives many coats, but his last coat outlives him (86 e–88 b).

This draws from Socrates what is at this

stage Plato's last argument on the subject. We noticed before that opposites arise from one another; the great becomes small, the hot becomes cold, and so forth. But the opposite ideas do not pass into one another; for instance, greatness does not become smallness nor does heat become chill. Further, entities whose nature it is to possess one idea, never admit the opposite; snow cannot become hot, nor fire become cold. Now it is the function of the soul to make alive; for life and death are distinguished by the presence or absence of soul; in other words, the soul as such possesses life, and therefore cannot admit death. The soul therefore is deathless and imperishable (102 d-106 d).

That is, in the *Phaedo*, Plato's final argument; it is plain that it has no cogency. It does indeed prove that there cannot be a dead soul; the soul cannot be, and be dead, any more than the fire can be, and be cold. But the fire may go out; and Plato has not proved that the soul cannot go out, and altogether cease to exist. He establishes that the soul is, in one sense, deathless (*ἀθάνατον*, 105 e), but this sense is such as to make illegitimate

his further conclusion that, if deathless, it must be imperishable (*ἀνώλεθρον*, 106 c).

I have spent time on the arguments of this Dialogue because they show the kind of difficulty under which the whole subject labours when handled from the philosophic point of view, but also because Plato points unerringly to the vital matter when he says that what we need is, not a proof of mere survival, but of the eternity of the soul. Survival for a limited period only postpones the evil, and utterly fails to safeguard the interests, whether ethical or sentimental, which cause men to care for immortality.

It is also interesting that in this very Dialogue almost any reader feels that Plato trusts more to the actual behaviour of Socrates at the moment of death than to his arguments just before, to produce conviction. Crito asks how Socrates wishes to be buried. "How you like," says Socrates, "if you can catch me. But I am going away." He will not wait till the last possible moment to drink the hemlock. As the chill creeps up his body, he uncovers his face and says to Crito—"I owe Arclepius a cock ; pay the debt, don't forget."

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The cock was the offering of poor men to Arclepius, the god of healing, which they presented on recovery from an illness; Socrates died poor, for he had taken no fees such as the Sophists required; so it is only the poor man's offering that he can make. But his death is a recovery and involves some offering to the god of healing; he is recovering from the fitful fever of life (115 c-118).

In the *Republic* he has another argument. Nothing perishes but by its own disease; if a man dies of poison the poison does indeed kill the body, but only by first throwing it out of gear, and introducing into it disease of its own. But the disease or evil of the soul is injustice; and injustice manifestly does not kill the soul, for it may co-exist with great vitality (608 d-611 b).

Plato never repeated the arguments for immortality which he elaborated in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. But in the *Phaedrus*, a Dialogue of about the same date as the *Republic*, he has an argument of a wholly different kind. Here he argues that because the soul is the source of its own movement, or, in other words, is essential activity and does not only become



active through communicated impulse from without, it has in itself the principle of eternal life. But it is doubtful whether the argument is intended to prove the eternity of every individual soul as such or only that of the spiritual principle in the universe. It is true that it is only valid as applied to the latter. And this seems to have been recognised by Plato himself, for in the *Timæus* he has come round to the point of view, which in this Lecture I should desire to urge, namely, that the soul is not immortal in its own right, but has immortality conferred upon it by God.

It will be remembered that in this Dialogue he comes very near to the Christian doctrine of creation. He is attempting to explain the origin of the world; God, he says, is good, and therefore free from all jealousy; consequently He desired that there should be as many beings as possible to share His perfection (29 e). Upon the spiritual beings whom He thus creates He confers the eternity which belongs of right to Him alone (41 a, b). You will see how close this is to the Christian doctrine that God is Love, and created a universe on which to lavish His love.

Plato, then, consistently believes in human immortality, though the arguments with which he supports that belief vary at different dates ; and the eternal world is for him at all times a sphere of judgment. Three of his great Dialogues—the *Gorgias*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Republic*—end with a myth concerning the passage of the soul from this world to the other ; and each contains a vision of judgment. As we have seen, it is only the incurable who are punished eternally : some such he believes there are. They are used for the only good purpose they can any longer serve, namely, to warn others ; they are past the point at which it is possible to treat them as ends in themselves, and it becomes legitimate to regard them as means only. We may not assent to this, yet we cannot but recognise that, terrible as the judgment is in Plato's presentation, his conception of God is more merciful than that which has many times been presented as the doctrine of Christianity.

This naturally leads to our second main topic, which is Theology proper. Here his leading principle is very simple, though it leads to immense perplexities ; for the leading

principle is just this : that God is good, and therefore the author of good only (*Republic*, 379 a-c). This dogma is indeed laid down primarily with direct reference to elementary education. Plato is considering what is to be done with the mythology which constitutes the main part of literary education for Greek children. He agrees with Adeimantus that the stories told about the gods are demoralising. But it is not only for the sake of the moral influence upon the children that they are banished ; they are also untrue. This does not mean merely that they state events which have not happened, but that they convey a false conception of God. The former kind of untruth Plato is quite ready to support ; there are, he says, two kinds of story, and in education we begin with what is false. By this, of course, he means that we begin with fables, which in an historical point of view are not expressions of truth, but which are so written as to leave upon the mind the true impression. These must be written for our children in the light of the dogma stated above. From this it follows that the Divine must never be associated with what is dishonourable,

and that God must not be represented as appearing in assumed forms ; for the motives which may occasionally justify lying can have no application to Him, and to appear in an assumed form is virtually to lie. So far as moral theology goes, all may be plain sailing ; but when we come to the more philosophical questions, difficulties begin. For in this very passage he admits that if God is the author of good only, he must be the author of less than half our experience, since the evil things in life are many more than the good things. And yet side by side with this we have the assertion that God or the Idea of Good is the controlling principle in the universe. Plato does not in any way explicitly deal with the problem of evil on any extensive scale, but it is clear that somehow or other he connects it with limitation in time and space, or in other words with finitude generally. He was far too real in all his thought to be content with calling it mere negation or a " shadow where light ought to be " ; yet he would seem to regard it as arising from the failure of this temporal world to embody perfectly the eternal principles or ideas which in their imperfect

manner its constituent elements resemble. It is clear enough from this that Plato is pressing on, as it were, towards a conception of God akin to the Christian, and we have already seen that his doctrine of the Creation in the *Timæus* comes as near as it possibly can to the attribution of the Creation to Divine Love.

We have seen so far that with regard to the two fundamental problems, the character of God and the destiny of Man, Plato comes curiously near the Christian position. The same can be said of his conception of moral excellence. We saw in tracing the argument of the *Republic* that in his hands Justice is changed from anything like a selfish claim of rights into an unselfish rendering of service ; and yet here too he just fails to take the last step, for he entirely fails to appreciate the excellence of sacrifice. This is most conspicuous in the answer which he gives to the question whether we shall not be injuring our philosopher-kings in calling upon them to abandon, for a time at least, their contemplation of eternal truth and condescend to the administration of political affairs. His answer

is that in the State which we have founded there will be no injury, for the capacity to contemplate eternal truths will itself have been developed by the society which they are called upon to serve, and we shall only be making a just demand upon just men who for this reason will feel no resentment at it. But this would not be true with regard to any actual State. There the philosopher has won his intellectual vision in spite of rather than by the assistance of society; he has attained by his own efforts alone; he owes society, therefore, no debt, and would not be right to leave the better life of contemplation and descend to the inferior life of action (519 d-520 b).

There are two obvious comments to make on this. The first is that, like so many idealists, Plato ignores to a great extent the good elements present even in contemporary Greek society. It must have looked as if throughout his life Socrates had been opposed by nearly all the forces of the time, but Socrates himself could not have emerged in a barbarous state. He stood indeed high above the level of contemporary life, but he could

only reach that eminence by using what was good in that very life, and in the *Crito* we may see his conviction of a debt to obey the laws of Athens even when they pass upon him an unjust sentence, because of all that they have done for him in his life hitherto.

This leads to the second comment, which refers to his exclusion of sacrifice. This is an instance of what is perpetually discoverable in his writings; his theory falls short of his intuition. We may mention two other examples. In the tenth Book of the *Republic*, he says that, whereas the artificer in making any material object imitates the eternal idea, an artist only imitates the imitation (595 a-598 d); but in Book V he said that we do not blame an artist who depicts a face more beautiful than any actual human face either is or ever could be (472 d). In other words, when he forgets to theorise, he knows that the artist is really representing the eternal idea far more adequately than the artificer, or even than nature; but when he comes to explicit theory he falls short of that intuition.

Again, in theory he regards pity as a weakness; he will not have Achilles, who is a hero,

represented as mourning for his friend ; for the better a man is the more self-sufficient he will be, and therefore the more indifferent to the life and death of his friends (387 d–388 d). He forbids us to witness certain kinds of drama because they appeal to and develop the impulse of pity and compassion which are weaknesses in men (605 c–607 a). And yet he wrote the *Phaedo* ; and we know that in his heart he must have valued the pathos of the scene described.

So it is with regard to sacrifice ; according to his theory, to ask a man to forfeit some self-culture for the sake of social service will be wrong unless it can be claimed as payment of a debt ; even then, while no injury, it is still from the individual's point of view regrettable. This is all due to the fact that his mind has never grasped that for a man to sacrifice himself for the community is good, not only for the community, but for the man too ; he never grasped the excellence that is in sacrifice itself, and he is trying to judge it by an outside standard ; but he knows that the whole life of Socrates was a sacrifice, and still more his death. He knows that he chose



to die rather than live after an abandonment of his mission, which would suggest that his mission had been false, and even rather than escape from prison when the duties of good citizenship called upon him to remain and submit to the sentence ; and again his heart told him that this sacrifice was excellent, though his theory lags behind.

In short, we feel that, noble as is the picture of Justice, it is still not love ; for love finds sacrifice its most natural expression and does not stop to balance up the good abandoned and the good secured, for it knows that in itself, active in sacrifice as it is, it has a value greater than either. It is just this failure to pass from justice to love which prevents Plato from finally rounding off his system ; for the Idea of Good, as we have seen, is justice in the universe. All the parts exist to serve the whole ; so far so good ; but he never went on to say that the whole exists for service of the parts ; nor did anyone else say so until God came into the world and shewed His love alike by life and by death.

It is now obvious that Plato's works afford a definite anticipation of much that Christianity

gave to the world. Partly, this is apparent in the actual conclusions which he reaches, still more in the fact that he stops short at a point where satisfaction is not forthcoming. He represents at once an approach to the perfect satisfaction of the soul, and a confession of failure to attain to it until there was given something that was then not yet given. But more important even than this is the preparation which he accomplishes in what may be called the spirit of thought. His quite reckless idealism, his relentless criticism, and his combination of passion with the cold light of reason, kindle desire for a truth which shall be able to stand firm without artificial supports, and can satisfy, not only the intellect, but the entire soul. At Alexandria the spirit of Plato met with the tradition of Judaism, and in Philo we find a deliberate attempt to combine his writings with the Old Testament. Plato had not himself made any prominent use of the doctrine of the Logos, which began with Heraclitus and became the dominant element in Stoicism ; but his analysis of the soul, with the conception of justice as realised only when the rational element is

supreme and allots to each of the other elements their sphere of action, and the expansion of justice into the Idea of Good as governing the universe, is substantially very near the Logos doctrine. For the Logos alike in Heraclitus and the Stoics is the supreme rational principle by which the world is governed. This Philo combines with "the word of the Lord" in the Old Testament, the word which is the expression—and therefore revelation — of the transcendent God of Judaism; so that everything is ready, so far as intellectual apparatus is concerned, for St. John's interpretation of Christ when He comes.

Moreover, it is the Platonism of Alexandria which lies behind the whole theology of St. Athanasius and provides the language in which the Nicene Creed and the great orthodox formularies generally are drawn up. In fact, at the time of the Council of Nicea, it may, broadly speaking, be said that to accept Plato as philosophical master was almost essential to orthodoxy, while Aristotle was undoubtedly regarded with suspicion. [All through the great formative period, while the human mind was attempting to master more and more

elements of Christian truth, Plato was its guide. When this task was for the time accomplished, Aristotle, whose supreme genius lay mainly in analysis, took Plato's place; for the work now to be done was not so much the conquest of new fields as the consolidation of that which had been won, and the ordering of it; so medieval theology, which is more concerned to correlate what is known than to reach new knowledge, is Aristotelian rather than Platonic in principle.

It is curious to modern readers that the Dialogue which had most influence in the early times was the *Timæus*. This is partly because it hints at certain Christian ideas (for people have traced in it an outline of the doctrine of the Trinity, and the Universe, which is called the "Son of God," is also expressly called "Only-begotten"), and also partly because of the relatively accidental fact that of it alone a Latin translation was available. But the general conception in the *Republic* of a City in Heaven of which we may even now be citizens, also had enormous influence. When St. Paul says "our citizenship is in Heaven"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Philippians iii, 20.

he is talking pure Platonism ; when the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of the earthly tabernacle as made in imitation of a spiritual tabernacle in the Heavens, of which it is an imperfect copy, it is speaking in a way for which the Platonic theory of Ideas had prepared. But perhaps more important than providing material of expression to each of these writers, was the service which Plato rendered to the Church through St. Augustine. When Rome, which had called itself the Eternal City and had been regarded as such by all civilisation, fell before the invasion of the Goths, St. Augustine was able to rally the spiritual forces of Christendom in loyalty to the Eternal City of God. Of course his interpretation of this is thoroughly Christian, but the idea behind it originates with Plato ; and his discussion of civilisation as displaying two tendencies—the one towards selfishness and antagonism, the other towards co-operation and fellowship—is drawn straight from the *Republic* itself.

Before leaving this part of the subject, it is worth while to point out that the two strands in Plato's thought with regard to the eternal

realities correspond to two permanent and permanently different interpretations of the universe. When he speaks of the separation of the Ideas from their particulars he is using the language of ordinary Mysticism; the seeker after truth or reality must turn his back on this world and grasp the eternal in a pure intuition. When he speaks of the particular as participating in the Idea, or of the Idea as present in the particular (as in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedo*), he is on the verge of that sacramental view of the physical world which may be said to constitute Christian mysticism, and to be the inevitable result of belief in the Incarnation.<sup>1</sup> The former leads to Plotinus, the latter to St. John.

It is curious to notice how close is the parallel between the Papal theory of medieval Europe and the outline of Plato's Ideal State. In that Ideal State there were three main classes—the philosopher-kings who governed in the light of eternal truth; the warrior class obedient to the kings, and fighting either

<sup>1</sup> This does not turn its back upon the creature in seeking the Creator, but adores the Creator in His creatures. It must be admitted that many mystics who were members of the Church have belonged to the other school.

for the defence of the State or for the sake of civilisation against barbarism ; and the craftsmen who produced the necessities and comforts of life generally. So in the medieval theory, at any rate in its Papal form, there stood at the head of Christendom the Pope, whose voice was to be taken as the voice of God. Below him and under his supreme authority, spiritually if not secularly, stood the kings of the nations, each having subordinate to him the feudal barons, just as the kings were themselves subordinate to the Pope. The main concern of the barons at least was with war, and the pursuit of such pleasures and exercises as were fitted for warriors. Below these again came the mass of citizens, whether serfs or free, mainly concerned in the different departments of material production. Europe under Innocent III was an attempt to set up something remarkably like Plato's Ideal State ; but of course it had not the two great cementing virtues of Temperance and Justice ; it lacked Temperance as Plato defines it, inasmuch as the two lower classes consisting, one of kings and barons, and the other of citizens generally, did not

confine themselves to the performance of their own functions, but perpetually invaded the prerogatives both of one another and of the supreme ruler. The system also lacked Justice in so far as the Pope himself had not, as indeed he could not have, that complete knowledge of the ultimate truth which alone can enable the philosopher-king to govern a city by the light of it. It is made clear in the *Republic* itself that unless the philosopher is a perfect philosopher he had much better not be king. Political power and philosophic insight can only safely be combined when the philosophic insight is absolute. And of course it is for precisely this reason that the Papacy broke down. The Papacy failed chiefly because the Popes themselves were not content with spiritual authority derived from their knowledge of truth, but endeavoured to back their spiritual authority by worldly power, and so first came under, and then fell before, the temptation of worldliness.

But while there is this close parallel between the medieval theory of Christendom and the Platonic Ideal State, it is also true that the temper of mind in these ages was rather



Aristotelian than Platonic. Indeed, this whole scheme of government is an application to politics of the subsumptive logic of the Prior Analytics—the logic of pure deduction, which the medieval scholastics endeavoured on all sides to apply. For the whole principle of this logic is to arrange terms in pyramids; at the apex the *summum genus*; below this the various *genera* or kinds; below each of these again its constituent *species*; below each of these the sub-species, and at last the individual facts or persons. All medievalists regarded society in much this way, but there were two rival pyramids. According to the Papal scheme the Pope actually represented God on earth; of him held the Emperor; the various kings held of the Emperor; the barons of the kings; and so on till we reach the serfs. According to the Imperial theory, God is Himself the apex of the pyramid; the Pope and Emperor, who stand on a level, both hold of him, and from them proceed the authorities of the ecclesiastical and temporal officers. It is interesting to note that the first philosophic attempt to arrive at a theory of society from another basis simply inverts

the same process, and beginning with the isolated individuals proceeds to construct a pyramid with absolute monarchy at its head. The influence of this pyramidal scheme upon Hobbe's "Leviathan" is made perfectly plain by the frontispiece to that work.

The theology of the Middle Ages also is entirely Aristotelian. St. Thomas Aquinas, the supreme expression of medieval thought, represents the attempt to co-ordinate the whole of Christian doctrine by means of the Aristotelian logic, as that logic was then understood. The Renaissance was no doubt a movement to which very many causes contributed; but one main element in it was the revival of the Platonic spirit as against the dominant Aristotelian. Plato again began to be read, having for many centuries been almost forgotten; and his spirit chimed in with the aspirations of the time, giving encouragement to the desire to press forward into new fields of thought, instead of being content to move round and round the established orthodox scheme.

But even during the centuries in which Plato himself was little known, his spirit had

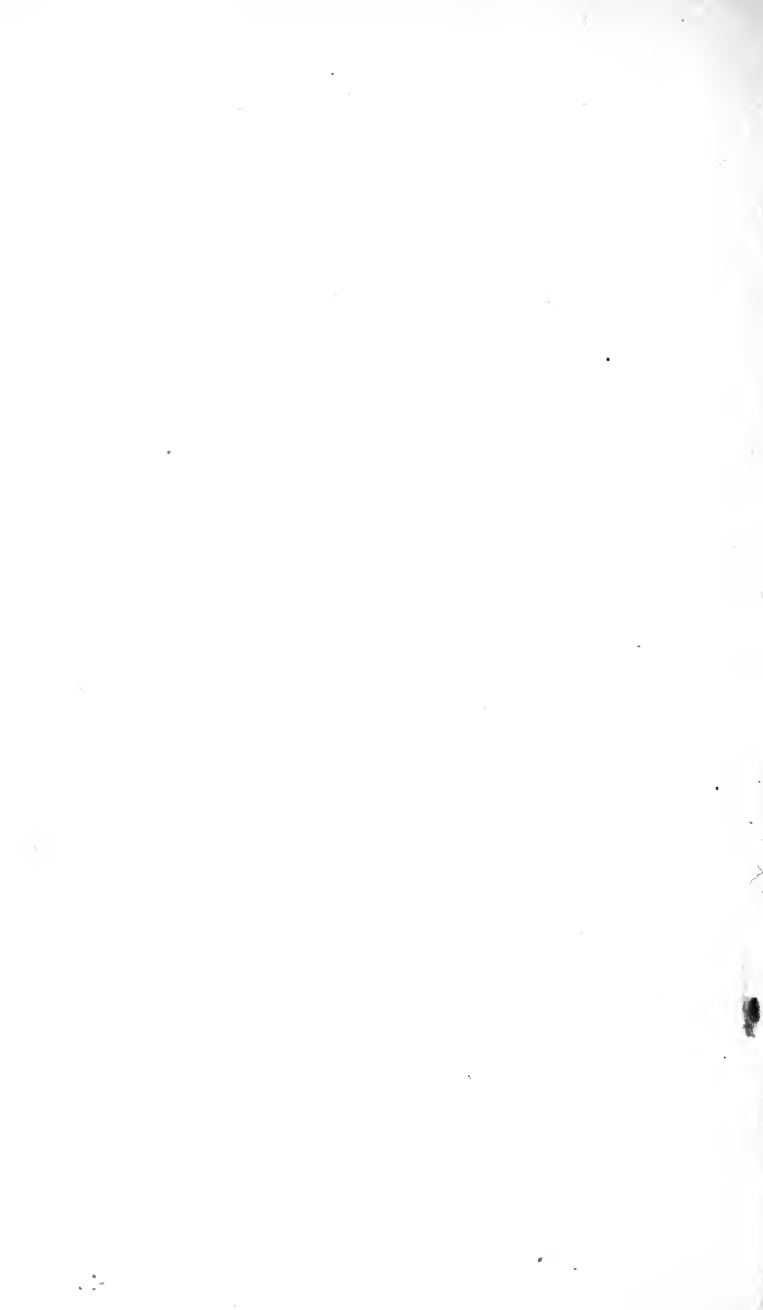
been at work on one most important side of theology, for there was a steady stream of Christian mysticism whose fountain head was St. Augustine, and St. Augustine himself is emphatic with regard to his debt to Platonism. From him and through St. Bernard the Platonic tendency is maintained at least so far as concerns the aspirations of the individual soul.

But if Plato was a considerable factor in bringing about the Renaissance, and in forming the mind of St. Augustine, anyone who reflects how much the Reformation owed to the Renaissance in spite of its quarrels with it, and how much Luther owed to St. Augustine, will see at once how immensely great Plato's influence has been upon the modern world. This is, indeed, what might have been expected. The Greek nation has been the source of nearly all that is alive in thought or civilisation as distinct from pure religion, and Plato is the culmination of the Greek genius. It has, indeed, been said that Plato is not a typical Greek; that is true, but only because he is more Greek than all the other Greeks together. In him the intellectual passion—which is the

conspicuous mark of the Greek genius—comes not only to flower but to fruit, which bursts and scatters its seed broadcast. Hellenism here comes to its utmost limits and bursts them, and Plato is left at last, wondering whether perhaps his Ideal State may not, even as he writes, exist somewhere outside the knowledge of the Greeks, in what they would call a barbarian land, and with his whole system manifestly incomplete because it is waiting for just that one final touch—that one crowning glory—which only Christianity could give.

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