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P L A T O

BY

PROSSER HALL FRYE

ὁ δὲ νοῦν ἔχων ἐπιθυμοῖ που ἂν αἰεὶ εἶναι παρὰ τῷ αὐτοῦ βελτίονι.

—*Phædo*, 62e

The Committee on Publications of the University of Nebraska wishes to make grateful acknowledgment to Sherlock Bronson Gass, Kenneth Forward, and Clarence Allen Forbes, who spent many hours deciphering and preparing the original manuscript of this work for the press. It was a labor of love and their effective tribute of admiration for their former colleague.

EDITORS' PREFACE

It is appropriate that the University of Nebraska should publish, as a grateful memorial, the principal work which Professor Frye left behind him at his death in 1934. And it is especially appropriate because not only the work itself but the very spirit which animated it was engendered here on the spot, in the sparse leisure of his nearly forty years of teaching. For when he came, in the middle nineties, he had a bent toward science and mathematics; and it was here, paradoxically through friendship with a man of science, Louis Trenchard More, that he turned his face to the Greeks. Through this friendship he later came to know Mr. More's brother, Paul Elmer More, and Irving Babbitt, with whose names his own is associated by the tie of their common humanism.

Meantime, in his early days here, he published a volume of verse, *The Substance of His House*, and then, like Cousin's young men of Paris, settled down in a garret to starve and read Plato. His pen was soon busy, however, giving expression, through literary criticism, to the double strain in him of poet and rationalist. It was this double strain, probably, that enabled him, drawing upon both, to give such depth and clarity and precision to the distinction between the classic and the romantic spirits in literature and life—a distinction which served him as his critical *point d'appui*. Most of his shorter criticisms appeared first in the *Independent*, the *Bookman*, and the *Nation*; the longer ones in *University of Nebraska Studies* and the University's *Mid-West Quarterly*, which latter he founded, and edited almost single-handed for over four years. Selections from among these publications, together with numerous fresh studies, he issued from time to time in book form: *Literary Reviews and Criticisms* in 1908, *Romance and Tragedy* in 1922, and *Visions and Chimeras* in 1928.

That a humanist should write about Plato needs scarcely more explanation than that a man of science should write about natural phenomena. The text of the present volume, however, does need a prefatory remark. To say that the several essays, or chapters, which make it up were not composed for publication is too sweeping, for the one on "Plato's Political Ideas" appeared entire in the *Mid-West Quarterly* in 1914, and one section of "The Dialogues" appeared in 1928 in a congratulatory volume to Charles Francis Johnson of Trinity. Both these passages, therefore, had the final care which the imminent prospect of print induces in any author. But these passages make up less than a third of the whole; the rest was left in still fluid manuscript. Not, indeed, that it was left unrevised. The

half-sheets, originally crossed with the crotchets of an almost microscopic handwriting, were recrossed, interlined, and supplemented on scraps pinned to the margin—sometimes in the interest of a finer clarity, a subtler nuance, or a denser coherence, sometimes of a juster cadence in the rhythm of the sentence. It is but just to Professor Frye's memory, however, to record that the larger part of the text never underwent his final and telling scrutiny.

How telling that scrutiny could be, anyone with a mind exigent of precision and an ear attuned to the rhythms of prose may discover by turning to *Romance and Tragedy* and reading the "Racine," or the "Shakespeare and Sophocles," or to *Visions and Chimeras* and reading the "Pascal" or the "Montaigne." But much of the distinctive flavor of the man is here—the elegiac note that seems inseparable from the richer cadences of the English sentence, the sub-humor of a new turn given to an old idiom, and above all the intimate sense as of a mind thinking, and moving forward, phrase by phrase, in an ardent intensity of concern for the high significance of the theme. That these essays were a labor of love is made clear in the text and is apparent in the span of years covered by their composition. That the rendering of the text has been a labor of love rather than of erudition is the apology of the editors.

S. B. G.

K. F.

C. A. F.

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I

INTRODUCTION

As a contribution to Platonic scholarship the following essays will turn out, I am afraid, to be thoroughly insignificant. If so I am sorry for it; I owe so much to Plato that I should like to make some sort of adequate acknowledgment. But unfortunately I am neither profound nor erudite; while the difficulty of my position is increased by the fact that I am by no means sure of being so good a Platonist as I could wish to be, particularly when I ponder the opinions of many who have no doubt of their own competence. By early reading I was confirmed a realist if not a materialist, a creature whom, for that matter, I continue to hold in greater esteem than an idealist, so stubborn are my youthful prejudices. I grew up with Spencer, Darwin, and Huxley, Bain, Maudsley, and Clifford in my hands—and what expositors they were!—and I still feel more at home in their lowly dwellings than on the dizzy pinnacles of the metaphysicians, whom I have frequented of later years. It was all so plain and solid and settled in those happy days when matter and energy were capable of anything, when consciousness was only a nervous tremor, and thought a mode of motion. Has such a fare come to seem a little juiceless and innutritious? And yet in comparison with the spidery fabrics of the transcendentalists, how rich and varied the picture, how detailed and copious the panorama, in which all the myriad forms of nature took their places, as evolution unrolled its transformations one after another from “an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity” (if I may borrow the terminology of the Spencerian *ἄπειρον*) to that triumph of differentiation and integration, the body and brain of man! What a semblance of order and gradation with every variation catalogued and etiquetted!

And yet in a system which engaged to dispose of everything, and did in fact dispose of so much, there was one fatal omission. It took care of man and his appetites, but for his aspirations it made little or no provision—for to a sympathetic tie or bond of union with the powers and agencies about him it was quite indifferent. With his moral scruples it left him alien and estranged, a horrified spectator, in the midst of creation—so that even for Huxley his highest activities would seem to be exercised in defiance of the nature which conceived him. In this respect the advantage lies with spiritualism. But how insubstantial the foundation, how flimsy the superstructure—a bare framework or shell of generality and abstraction! I acknowledge the “naïveté”, the credulousness required to accept the validity of the outer world on the evidence of the senses; but practically we do so accept it, and having once done so are

bound to recognize its multiformity and discreteness. For as a mere shadow of mind, a specter of reality, there is about it a disconcerting obduracy, a maddening refractoriness (*ἀνάγκη*) which the architects of idealism have never yet succeeded in reckoning with.

Now, I do not suppose that Plato himself has done anything like justice to generation; such was not his original purpose. And yet it is indubitable that he insists upon certain facts and distinctions that those other philosophers have ignored or slighted. In particular, for all their differences, both idealist and materialist (I use the terms roughly for the two orders of rationalism) unite in packing all creation aboard one boat, like Pyrrho and his pig—man and beast, stock and stone, the sentient and the insentient promiscuously under a single set of articles or bill of lading. In this confusion, incident to every system of monism, idealism is by all odds the worse offender, since materialism does concede, at least tacitly, a sort of practical efficiency to mind, whereas idealism tends but to attenuate and impoverish actuality the more typical and absolute it becomes. For this reason, if Plato were living to-day, I am convinced that he would take the greater interest in science.¹ Such an opinion is contrary, I know, to the general belief which persists in affiliating Platonism with the transcendental metaphysics. But then I am neither an idealist nor a metaphysician; and if one or both of these characters are indeed essential to the Platonist, then I can hardly claim the privilege of a disciple, and must seek some other justification for venturing upon this ground at all.

It is nearly a hundred years now since Cousin complained that outside of six or seven poverty-stricken students starving in the garrets of Paris, Plato was virtually unknown to his generation; and while he spoke, of course, for his country solely, the case could not have been very much better, I imagine, elsewhere. That the situation has changed completely in the course of a century it would be idle to deny. Partly at Cousin's instance, but mainly for other causes, the concern for Plato has grown amazingly. The "literature" of the last decade or two alone would crowd a good-sized book-case, if not an entire library. So far so good. The difficulty is that the subject, in developing, has tended to become a kind of vested interest, the affair of "specialists," *Fachmänner*—so much so that for a layman to venture an opinion on the subject, or even for a critic to express himself in the premises otherwise than in certain set and appointed ways, is looked upon as something of an indiscretion if not an impertinence. In this respect Plato's plight is not unlike Shakespeare's. As there

¹ For that matter he would be more likely to sympathize with the realists than with the idealists—almost anybody but the idealists—for he did at least believe in "the discovery of a world independent of the perceiver," however he might differ with some of them regarding the character of that world.

is an exclusive and official Shakespearean scholarship, so there has come to be an equally jealous Platonic faculty, of which no one is free who has not undergone his novitiate and initiation at the hands of a regularly ordained pontiff. And in the meantime Plato, like Shakespeare, is in danger of ceasing to be a liberal study and is turning into a profession—if the mischief is not done already—though it is not merely with the erudite that he must count but with the serious-minded at large, if he is to count as an influence at all. To them, like his master Socrates, he was not ashamed to address himself directly; it was for them in the main that he wrote, and it was they whom he must have hoped to awaken and inspire. In spirit Platonism is not properly a technology; it is a humanity. But unfortunately the present is an age with more regard for learning. Hence its struggles, when it busies itself with the subject at all, to find, like Aristotle, in Platonism, by hook or crook, a body of knowledge, a science of some sort,—a logic or metaphysic, an epistemology, even a scheme of natural “law”; or at least an esoteric art and “mystery.” But just as the observations of any thoughtful man when inspired by Shakespeare are likely to prove suggestive and haply instructive, it is a great pity that there should not be more general converse with Plato too. There will be few enough at best who seek to him—how many intimates has he now for all his commentators and expositors? “Who has time nowadays to read Plato?” asks Gissing. “Perhaps fifty people in the United Kingdom—if so many.” And they should rather be welcomed and encouraged than rebuffed or even tolerated on sufferance².

It would be hard to find even in our literature—certainly, it cannot be found among the Elizabethans, including Shakespeare himself—a clearer mirror of the times than that which Plato holds up before our civilization. The people among whom he lived and with whom he colonized his writings are not so very dissimilar from our own. Like us the Athenians were thoroughly democratic; they were great talkers, tremendous boasters, unconscionable politicians; quite devoid of scruples, corruptible, venal, dishonest; luxurious and extravagant, with an insatiable thirst for novelty and distraction, self-indulgent, materially minded, capable of paying themselves with words to any extent, skeptical, arrogant, self-conceited, and superstitious. As for their worst vices, if the failure of Greek civilization was due, as some moralists like to believe, to their contempt of the feminine ideal, what shall be said of our efforts to obliterate the distinction in favor of a civilization essentially epicene? And though I may be mistaken in thinking for my own part that the Nemesis of the Athenians was

² As an offset to this sort of deformation it is a relief to read a book like E. J. Urwick's *The Message of Plato* for its very extremity in the opposite sense.

politics, as it is like to prove our own, yet there can be little doubt of the danger in both cases from the jealousy of public life, a danger so much the greater in our society for the fact that even the women are no longer exempt from its seductions. Nor do such parallel sins, suggestive as they may be, do much more than scratch the surface of the subject. There is hardly a "modern" doctrine of any importance, a leading philosophical idea—no, nor a principal heresy—which is not aired and exposed in Plato's pages. Consider the draughts of controversy blowing through the dialogues, the whirl of contradictory opinion with all its fantastic diversity—the voices of Callicles and Thrasymachus and all those other young men who talk as though they had been reading Nietzsche overnight; of Protagoras, the pragmatic "humanist," and Prodicus, the "neo-realist," the whole chorus of Sophists, the professional "educators" of the time³, with their preparation for "citizenship" and "leadership," and on all sides the silly idolatry of rhetoric, self-expression, and "art."

In short, it is all, or very nearly all in Plato already, with the inestimable advantage that the reflection has acquired perspective by virtue both of distance and the brilliancy of the speculum. For whatever else he was, the Athenian was intelligent by nature—Galton pronounces him as superior to us in that respect as we are to the African negro; and in no one is this clarity of mind, when untroubled by its vices, displayed to better advantage than in Plato. There may well be many matters of which Plato himself was ignorant, but at least his ignorance is clearly delimited. In this sense he is as certain of what he does not know as of what he does know. Such knowledge, he agrees with Socrates, is the beginning of wisdom. He abandons the study of nature for that of man; he is no lover of the country or of landscape—it is too vague and romantic—but of humanity and cities. He feels no fascination in obscurity; darkness is in his eyes the deprivation of light. A hole-and-corner mystification, the profundity of the cavernous, he finds distasteful. Imagine Plato whimpering over his lost illusions in our semi-hysterical, feministic vein, as though to be rid of error were an intolerable deprivation. Even death he has succeeded in divesting of its chimerical horrors: "Be of good cheer," he says, "no evil can befall a good man alive or dead."⁴ The sun is his symbol; and for the most part it floods his discussions with an equable diffusion of transparent day.

Nevertheless there is something in Plato's spirit, it must be added, peculiarly "unsympathetic" to the "modern" mind. His distinction, his

³ οὗτοι οἱ παιδευταί τε καὶ σοφισταί.— *Republic*, 492d.

⁴ *Apology*, 41c-d.

aristocratic temper, his intellectualism,⁵ his moral bias, his detestation of cant, his uncompromising hostility to "*was uns alle bändigt, das Gemeine*" make him repellent to that great pattern of democratic virtues, "the man in the street" or, in Matthew Arnold's more descriptive phrase, "the average sensual man." Nor do all the stronger minded appear to take to him readily either. How many excerpts from Plato have found their way into Matthew Arnold's note-book, "the critic's breviary" as it has not inaptly been called? In Goethe's *Gespräche mit Eckermann* I find but two references to him, and one of them has to do with Goethe's own *Farbenlehre* at that.⁶ In view of the latter's addiction to symbolism and the former's critical dogmatism, it may be Plato's naturalism, his habitual respect for actuality, as much as anything, which has done him a dis-service in these instances.

Of course it is possible to quote enough tributes—like John Stuart Mill's—to offset, and more, such slights as these; it may even be granted that "the philosophy of Plato has been, in the last forty years, one of the chief inspirations of a school of English political thought," and that "you may come across English working men to-day, if you talk with students from the tutorial classes . . . who have read and learned to love the *Republic*."⁷ That is not my point; and in view of the facts that I have instanced the question still depends whether it is possible, after all—I will not say to "popularize" or give a kind of currency to Plato in some special sense, but to extend his humane moral influence—if I dared to express my whole thought, I should say his religious influence, for that is the essential Platonism—beyond certain very narrow limits. All I am sure of is my indebtedness—an indebtedness which I have not the vanity to think I can in any manner repay, but to which I can at least own. I can testify that it is he, most of all, who has propped in these bad days my mind. And I can protest after a fashion against the romantic deformation which has made his name into a byword of airy and vacuous enthusiasm. For the Plato of the pedants is no more a falsification, no more suspect to good sense, than the Plato of the sentimentalists—the metaphysician of predication and abstraction than the mystic of aesthetic reverie and bemusement.

Needless to say, under the circumstances, I have no idea of proposing Platonism in satisfaction of the religious needs, wants, or desires, real or imaginary, of the time. Christianity has absorbed all the Platonism it

⁵ "The beast intellectualism," W. James: *Letters*, II, 290. The "bugbear called intellectualism" is Bosanquet's expression.

⁶ "Plato, cavillator urbanus, tumidus poeta, theologus mente captus"—such is Bacon's rather curious epigraph.

⁷ E. Barker: *Greek Political Theory: Plato and His Predecessors*, p. 392.

will hold so that it is pretty well saturated already; and Christianity is not faring any better at our hands on that account—rather worse, if anything. It is not likely then that an unmixed Platonism will have very much appeal for a race that, however it may superficially resemble the Greeks of the fourth century politically and temperamentally, and not least, I may add, in their indifference to this very Platonism, is not particularly remarkable for intellect in itself or respectful of it in others. And yet in spite of such cautionings of common sense I cannot quite rid myself of the conviction that Platonism is capable of serving as a kind of refuge from some of the perplexities and confusions of the day. Plato himself is at least free from the superstition that would make of matter the substratum of reality, and of the animal the father of the man. Whatever may be thought of the *Timæus* and its evolution *au rebours*, it is at all events untainted by the particularly noxious implication which our recent psychology has fixed upon that sufficiently ambiguous commonplace, “the descent of man.” Nor in spite of his aberrations—for so I must consider them—and the frailties of his declining years, is its author any less certain that justice and the other virtues—ἡ ἅλλη ἀρετή, in his own words—are genuine natures—much more truly so, let me say, than mass, inertia, and the other fabricative characters which have been foisted upon geometry in the attempt to explain the behavior of reality so called and which are gradually sloughing off again with the loss of what physical and material assurance we did for a while seem to possess. But above all, his insistence after the example of Socrates that our happiness does not consist with these matters or even with economics but with our own higher nature, in the health and sanity of the soul, and in its participation by knowledge in the divinity of that permanent and eternal pattern, the good—it is this belief that makes them both, and particularly him who has given their faith its scriptural expression, the greatest if not the first of the humanists.

And if my more modest attempt at the mere acknowledgment of a debt should still seem to smack a little of self-conceit, I can excuse myself only by recalling that if it had not been for some such witnesses as those poor students of Cousin’s a century ago in the garrets of Paris this tradition would have snapped long since. There may not be enough readers of Plato in the original to pay for more than one edition of the dialogues in the course of a life-time—if that. But how important it is then that one and another, here and there, sheltering under the wall against the inclemency of the times, should tend that fire to the best of his ability lest the world by its extinction become a gloomier habitation than ever.

II THE DIALOGUES

Incapable of systematic exposition myself, I am naturally suspicious of all attempts to systematize whatever is not a system on the face of it and obtrusively. In particular it is, in my opinion, only by a kind of violence or legerdemain that Plato can be made to submit to such treatment—I mean the Plato of the dialogues. The other Plato—if there ever was another, the esoteric Plato or the Plato of the school—we know little or nothing about, save darkly through the polemic of Aristotle, and that little is not reassuring. It may be that this other Plato prescribed to the Academy a rigidly concatenated curriculum; it is not impossible. And yet I imagine that we are prone to overrate its consistency, if not its comprehensiveness. Even the remarks on education in the *Republic* seem couched in the language of hope rather than attainment; while it is open to us, I suppose, to make what we please of the defection of a mind like Aristotle. At all events, that the Plato with whom posterity has most to do was no great methodist is obvious from the succession of his dialogues—or should I say, from the labor that has been spent in the attempt to recover their chronological order? In view of such evidence it requires more imagination than I for one am possessed of to think of Plato, like a German metaphysician, a Hegel or a Kant, setting out with a ready-made apparatus of axioms and postulates to realize a preconceived philosophy of “coherent, interdependent, subordinate, and derivative principles.” Rather, he appears to have begun improvidently with the discussion of such topics as happened to strike his fancy—moot questions of the fifth century, some of them, inherited from Socrates and the Sophists—and to have treated them just as they came, one after the other, of his own nature freely, without much regard to transition and consequence—often, in fact, quite inconclusively. That he should come gradually to recognize the principles underlying his spontaneous activity, the musculature of his own speculation, is only what might be expected—and that they should grow more and more precise as he continued. But only toward the close of his life will he be found dissecting them out and treating them formally after the manner of an anatomical preparation.

On the whole, then, it seems not only more congenial with my disposition but also more consonant with the facts to look upon Plato as a kind of essayist. Certainly what he has to say does not take its importance and confirmation from a punctilious agreement among the several parts. It is significant and convincing, on the contrary, as it describes an aspect

of truth from some point of vantage at which he happens or has contrived to find himself at the moment. Displace the point of view and the vision fades, as the village spire disappears among the trees the instant you move to right or left; his *aperçu* seems no longer plausible—or perhaps wholly intelligible. There is, to be sure, a general similarity of attitude from time to time; but his position is constantly shifting—as from the *Cratylus* to the *Symposium*, from the *Symposium* to the *Phædo* or from the *Phædrus* to the *Theætetus*.¹ Though his progress is, for a great while, fairly forthright in its approach to that one goal for which he cared, τὸν νοητὸν τόπον, “the region,” in Leibniz’ words, “of the eternal truths,” yet he troubles himself little for the regularity of his advance; nor do occasional retardations or even retrocessions disturb him very much. It is not the path by which he travels or the spot on which he rests; it is the prospect, the revelation for which he is concerned. In this sense every dialogue is a *coup d’œil*. It is a single sally, an essay in itself—a form of philosophic composition unspeakably shocking to discursive minds like De Quincey’s and curiously enough to Montaigne’s. And yet as Plato handles it, it has obvious advantages. It is compact and instant. It needs no preparation or supplementation, no scaffolding or shoring to sustain it. Above all, it is the record of a free play of the intelligence; it represents the moral nature, as a whole, one and undivided, in immediate contact with some single topic. Hence, in spite of Plato’s preference at times for refuting opinions that he does not hold rather than substantiating those that he does, it is perfectly competent as far as it goes and satisfactory in itself.

Not that Plato never reverts. To some subjects he comes again and again, so that his dialogues are meshed with an intricate network of cross-reference, and the whole or portions of some one may find a varied context in several others. To trace the gossamers of this web is one of the most fascinating of Platonic recreations: it excuses the persistency of scholarship in its efforts to methodize his thought. Only, as one or another thread is taken for a clue, there emerges a distinct pattern of opinion. In this way Plato has been made to appear, among other avatars, as a monist,² a dualist,³ a Wordsworthian pantheist,⁴ an expectant disciple of Kant,⁵ an ancient logician and grammarian,⁶ a kind of Attic Jansenist,⁷ an auto-hypnotic

¹ If Lutoslawski’s arrangement is to be trusted; and it has at least the merit in my eyes of corroborating on the whole a rapid-reading impression.

² Fouillée.

³ Pater.

⁴ Adam.

⁵ Natorp.

⁶ Gomperz.

⁷ More.

æsthete,⁸ a pre-Christian apostate,⁹ an Athenian Brahman,¹⁰ a statesman *manqué*,¹¹ and even the arch-rationalist himself.¹² No doubt, like the genius of philosophy itself, he was something of a logician, metaphysician, cosmologist, lawgiver, and poet by turns, if not simultaneously. Nevertheless, if the probable chronology is to be followed, the truth is that he approaches a problem anew only after an interval—often quite unexpectedly and from another quarter. The dialogues are inconsecutive in theme. And his later views are not so much in correction or revision—not always in extension—but rather in illustration of the earlier. It is not a development, it is a new vista that he offers. The gain is not by way of rational expansion but of insensible commutation. He outgrows his uncertainties as often as he resolves them. The topical advance appears as a saltus; and though he may take off quite obviously from some former position, the original essay still retains its character of singular and sufficient authenticity.

To a mind so vivacious as Plato's the dialogue offered a particular attraction over the set expository style to which curiously enough De Quincey seems totally blind. It gave him a chance to criticize doctrine not merely in the pure idea but in the character of its proponents, toward many of whom he was personally affected in one way or another, either through their association with Socrates or through his own acquaintance with them. From this source his reasoning borrows a peculiar cogency, like an *argumentum ad hominem*; it is not merely sophistry, it is Callicles or Thrasymachus or Hippias that he is confuting. And why not? A philosophy, after all, is no better than its adherents. And as these representatives of the views under discussion are human beings themselves, the argument, as a result, takes on a moral complexion quite distinct from that of the theme involved and reinforcing it. To this motive may be referred in great part the Platonic irony and that strain of comedy in the dialogues, which appears not uncalculated, when directed against the genuine offenders of virtue and sanity, to offset Aristophanes' satire of Socrates. That such a practice is likely to prejudice the impartiality of debate, is true; quite patently Plato is now and again engaged in settling old scores, nor is he always averse in a pinch to helping himself out with the Sophists' own petard. But it can not be gainsaid that the treatment, in giving to his strictures all the shrewdness of personalities, has imparted

⁸ Stewart.

⁹ Temple.

¹⁰ Urwick.

¹¹ Wilamowitz.

¹² W. James.

liveliness and pertinency to a kind of writing not always remarkable for wit or point.

In short, Plato is not content with recommending philosophy as a way of life; he illustrates it. Every dialogue is a drama, for whose *persona* philosophy is an occupation—protagonists who exemplify their principles in their behavior in addition to defending it in their speech. As truly and in somewhat the same manner as Corneille is reputed the dramatist of statescraft, Plato is the dramatist, as well as the expositor, of philosophy. Especially has he dramatized morality. It was the concern of his prime, the theme of his most energetic exercises, the frame of reference for his characterization and disquisition, as his Socrates amply proves. In this sense, even though he was no playwright, it is he who was the successor of the great tragedians, Æschylus and Sophocles—he and not Euripides. That his philosophy was explicit while theirs was implicit was incidental to the period, and being of necessity, was, as he would say, accidental and irrelevant—of the serious moral tradition of Athens he was, as far as the times allowed, the heir and perpetuator.

But no product of human invention is ever quite unique. That there was a great stock of Socratic conversations in circulation before as well as after Socrates' death—memories and reminiscences and recollections of his interviews with divers persons and personages—is matter of common conjecture. And it is not improbable that some of them were reduced to writing in the shape of notes and memoranda of one kind or another. How much literary coloring such records had taken on in the process, aside from the imaginative heightening they had previously by word of mouth, it is impossible to say. There is no evidence, however, of any genuine Socratic dialogues precedent to Plato's, difficult as it is in the light of analogy to believe that the form sprang of a sudden from Plato's brain full-armed. As an alternative to this sort of creation *ab nihilo*—he may have taken a hint from such report and gossip as was quickening Athens at the time; or what is more likely, he may have modeled his essays on the talk of his master itself. As the story goes, he had actually composed the *Lysis* before the execution of Socrates, provoking the mock-serious protest, "O Hercules! What lies this young fellow tells of me!" Gratifying though it would be to think of Xenophon's *Memorabilia* as an earlier development of the *genre*—it seems relatively so inchoate and elementary both in execution and thought; yet as a matter of fact the greater part of it is much later, and of secondary, sometimes of Platonic, inspiration. Nevertheless it challenges comparison with Plato's Socratic dialogues so called, as a kind of measurement for Plato's own achievement. Here is an example of what another, himself a familiar of Socrates, and even

more favorably situated as a later comer, was able to do with the same or similar material.

Nor should we think of the *Memorabilia* either, as we might be inclined to do on the strength of Xenophon's representations, as solely matter of fact. It is a work, not to say of compilation, of imagination too. Xenophon's avowed intention of vindicating the character of Socrates would lift it upon another plane than that of actuality, while Xenophon himself was by no means a contemptible man of letters. On the other hand, it is under bonds to a certain sort of truth; it is bound to be recognizable. And since Xenophon knew Socrates personally and admired him, it is only natural that even when he borrowed his material—from Antisthenes or another—he should pick and choose, as well as patch and pare, to suit his preconceptions, as his selection of interlocutors compared with Plato's seems to indicate that he did. As a result, the collection, though ostensibly biography, is in fact partly imagination, partly imitation, and partly portraiture, achieving hardly more than what Goethe would call the illusion of a common reality, even tripping occasionally on the edge of caricature,¹³ without other pretension than to reproduce by hook or crook the first-hand impression of a homely intimacy.

By contrast it is easy to appreciate the genius required first to conceive the possibility and then to realize it, of using this sort of matter, instinct with memory as it was, for the construction of a philosophical *genre* which should take advantage of the Socratic sentiment and celebrity even to the extent of recalling actual interpellations and interpellators and yet should throw off the clogs of actuality itself for the sake of introducing the author's own interpretations of thought and character and of insinuating, if not at once asserting, his own convictions and opinions, not only of the theses discussed but also of the disputants themselves. Nor save as an affair of scholarship does it make much odds—for where the literary records and remains are so fragmentary it is just as well to be wary—whether Plato was first in the field or not; his is the accomplishment and the perfection of the type to such an extent as to have extinguished rivalry.

The contents of the *Memorabilia* are very diverse in character and very uneven in tenor. The first few chapters of the first book are pretty certainly original and include the gist of Xenophon's contribution to the characterization of Socrates. On this account, while in themselves the most important and interesting of the collection, they are hardly pertinent to comparison. On the contrary the eighth and ninth¹⁴ chapters of the third

¹³ See III, XI, for instance.

¹⁴ "In jenem als sokratisch treu ganz besonders ausgezeichneten Capitel," says Joel of the ninth chapter: *Der echte und der Xenophontische Sokrates*, I, s. 93.

book, summarizing a few of the familiar Socratic teachings or what passed for such, recall the Platonic dialogues, though very much as a crude copy or rough draft might recall a finished painting. But not to compare incommensurables, one of the most elevated disquisitions of the *Memorabilia*, or what at least is intended as a pattern of its kind, occupies the third chapter of the fourth book, which purports to relate a conversation with Euthydemus, whereof Xenophon feigns to have been an auditor, concerning the goodness of God, something in the vein of Fénelon. "Tell me, Euthydemus, has it never occurred to you to think how carefully the gods have made provision for men's needs?" It is deistic theological moral commonplace, but commonplace of such an order, whatever its *provenance*, as a great French ecclesiastic at the beginning of the eighteenth century was not ashamed to father. And yet its superficiality is glaring in contrast with the penetration of almost any Platonic dialogue—the *Protagoras*, for example, not to say the *Gorgias*, or more fairly, perhaps, the *Charmides*, since its subject is avowedly sophrosyne and the opportunity to compare the conceptions of that virtue is too good to be missed. Nor would it be unprofitable either, in the interests of Plato's genius, to turn from the fourth chapter of the same book to the first book and a half of the *Republic*. The respondent of the *Memorabilia* on this occasion is Hippias, the theme is justice, and in the course of the argument the Socrates of the *Memorabilia* reflects, however mistily, the great Platonic (or is it indeed the Socratic?) conception of a universal moral order in distinction from the dingy "modern" heresy of an exclusively social ethics. "But whosoever transgresses the divine laws pays the penalty which none may in any wise escape, as do many transgressing human laws, some by stealth and some by violence." That it falls far short of the achievement of the *Republic* in exalting righteousness above Olympus and establishing it with happiness in the constitution of reality, is what might be looked for. Equally remarkable in these two instances is the apportionment of rôles; it was not to such characters as Euthydemus and his brother Dionysodorus, that precious pair of verbal contortionists, or to Hippias, the sciolist and jack of all trades, that Plato was in the habit of intrusting the conduct of his great moral debates.¹⁵

In one respect, it is true, Xenophon may be thought to have the advantage of the comparison. He touches in two instances at least a nerve

¹⁵ That these latter chapters have been under suspicion is no matter for my purpose, which is simply to get some sort of measure for Plato's excellence. Nevertheless whether this third chapter, together with the two following, actually belongs or not, there is no particular difficulty in thinking of it as an adaptation. The conception of sophrosyne is not Platonic. Is it authentically Socratic? or Antisthenic? At all events, if the two chapters I have cited are not evidence, they are perfectly good illustrations.

of sentiment to which Plato, it would seem, was nearly insensible. In the second chapter of the second book he represents Socrates admonishing the son of Xanthippe to a respect for his mother with a conventional delicacy which contrasts rather roughly with her husband's chilly dismissal of her in the *Phædo*. And again, in the succeeding chapter the reconciliation which Socrates effects between Chærephon and Chærekrates strikes a note which is lacking to the Platonic scale, though the consideration with which Plato always treats his own brothers may very well be put into competition with this display of sentimentality on the part of the Xenophontic Socrates. But these are exceptions; I mention them in fairness for what they may be worth—for even in delimiting Plato's range they leave his superiority in the common field untouched.

That a man of affairs with literary tastes should be excelled by a philosopher in profundity and acuteness of thought, seems no great matter for admiration. And yet in Plato's hands the Socratic dialogue is not solely a vehicle for the conveyance of ideas. It becomes as well the medium for the representation of a certain kind of experience. To be sure, there is some such dramatic notion inherent in the very conception of the dialogue as a *genre*. But the drama of Plato is more than an art; it is a faith, inspired by the Socratic contention that philosophy itself is nothing more or less than a way of life. And still, to such a pass of perfection as a literary form alone has Plato brought this drama of the contemplative or theoretic life that it is yet an insistent question to what extent and in how far the dialogues are to be taken in just this sense, as literature pure and simple.

It is fairly obvious, for example, that closing references to the renewal of a discussion are usually nothing more than devices of verisimilitude, as at the end of the *Protagoras*. To argue otherwise—to the existence of a dialogue since lost, or to carry over the invitation—say, to the *Gorgias*, is surely a little naïve at best. And yet the *Theatætus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman*, not to say the unborn *Philosopher*, have been coerced into a trilogy on little better grounds, to say nothing of the *Republic* and the *Timæus*. To the same effect it must be admitted that many opinions in their shading and manner of expression are determined by the imaginative requirements of the situation, occasion, surroundings, and characters; they are partly "atmosphere" and "local color," as is self-evidently the case in the *Symposium*. Less convincingly the so-called aporetic or inconclusive dialogues may be accounted for by other than exclusively philosophical considerations—such dubitative endings are not entirely unknown to the ingenuity of modern authorship—indeed, with some degree of plausibility where the reader has been given a clue to the solution of the problem, formally indecisive though the close may appear. Or on the other hand, may some of

this reluctance to *trancher la question* be due to Plato's impatience to commemorate Socrates' familiar theses and modes of thought before he had as yet made up his own mind in regard to them? Or again may he be merely maintaining the ironic pretense of Socrates' ignorance?

Further, it may be questioned whether the silence of Socrates in the *Parmenides*, the *Sophist*, and the *Statesman* has only a kind of poetic propriety, or whether it is significant of Plato's abandonment of the Socratic fiction or merely indicates his detachment from the discussion—a kind of modesty in the face of his own opinions. But then what is Plato's relation to the protagonist of his drama in general? How far, if at all, are the two to be identified, the latter as the mouthpiece of the former? With the ordinary playwright the inclination of the reader is, at times almost irresistibly, to attribute the sentiments of the characters to the author himself. But the interpretation of Plato would appear to have suffered in addition from the contrary disposition—to credit his characters with what are actually his own opinions—in particular his leading man. As between these two stools, is it Socrates or Plato who brings the indictment against written teaching in the *Phædrus*? And in the *Phædo* is it Plato or Socrates who impugns physical science? To be sure, this is one of the convictions with which Socrates is endowed by Xenophon,¹⁶ but hardly that for which he is satirized by Aristophanes in *The Clouds*. Again, in the *Phædo*, what is the symbolism of Plato's absence, so firmly underscored, I will not say from the death of Socrates—I will concede that point to "art"; but what is the sense of his absence from the debate on immortality with its heavy charge on the doctrine of ideas? Did he wish to bring that doctrine under Socrates' protection? Or is it possible that he is indicating as a matter of fact its Socratic origin? And finally, if Plato's Socrates is authentic and Plato but concurs with him, so to speak, why did not Xenophon, who had him under observation too, do better by him?

The answer is obvious. Eminent as Plato is in other respects, the triumph of his genius is the character of Socrates. It is Plato who is responsible for the great Socratic tradition. Not that he was without materials to work with; he had what Xenophon had, even more than Xenophon had—perhaps more than Antisthenes. He not only had the man; he understood him better—or so we like to believe. But whatever he owes to Socrates, Socrates owes more to him. And if his indebtedness to Socrates is exaggerated, he has no one to blame but himself; for it is by placing his own person directly in line with his master's and in the latter's shadow that he has ended by an effect of perspective in running the two figures together so that dramatically they are almost indistinguish-

¹⁶ *Memorabilia*, I, i, 11 *et seq.*

able. Philosophically, Plato preserves his own integrity more or less; but sentimentally, Socrates becomes possessed of all Plato's virtues in addition to his own—notably a serenity of spirit to which Plato never quite attained. In this manner Socrates has gained in mental stature, in poetic power, in urbanity—in short, the friend of Chærephon, the Socrates of the greasy cloak and tousled aspect, with his insolent ostentation of poverty, simplicity, and ignorance, with his bare feet and his boorish address, has been saved by the devotion of his pupil from the tradition of cynicism for that of culture and humanism.

Under the circumstances to attempt to discriminate between Plato and Socrates would be, as a rule, an impossible task. And not only so; it is an illegitimate one, based on a misconception of the literary medium chosen and perfected by Plato for the conveyance of his ideas; for the delight of the dialogues is that they are literature as well as philosophy, and that their appreciation calls for taste as well as intelligence. If Plato made Socrates in interpreting him, then for all representative purposes Socrates is Plato. As far as the dialogues go, Plato is known through his characters as Shakespeare is known through his, for it is sheer sophistry to deny the possibility of surprising the dramatist in his drama. With proper precautions, of course, since there are moments when the critical sense may not decline to recognize a kind of distinction in Plato's intentions. While in the dramatic dialogues generally he has no hesitation in merging his personality with Socrates' at the same time that he turns the familiar Socratic dialectic with all its reminiscent authority to his own uses; still in exceptional cases he appears concerned, on the contrary, to segregate the two characters and to hold his master apart and at arm's length. Such a purpose may account for his mention of himself and of his absence from Socrates' execution in the *Phædo*, a piece of self-assertion so at odds with his habit. Is it not as though he said: "Here is Socrates and yonder is Plato, separate and distinct beings; since I am relating, mark you, the death of Socrates"? At all events, however it is produced, some such special effect of portraiture is unmistakable in the *Apology*, the *Crito*, and the *Phædo* in spite of its discussion of the ideas—and, perhaps, in the *Symposium*. And it is perceptible elsewhere now and then, if not exactly definable.

Nor is Plato's language, on the whole, any less literary than his composition. As he was without a thorough-going system, so too he had no special terminology. His style is idiomatic, even colloquial, for he must have written by ear and very much as he talked—such indeed is the sense of his *genre*; though toward the close of his life he developed a more artificial and even intricate style which is not without its virtuosity. Still his expression is seldom technical. What specialized words and phrases he

does use are merely handy adaptations of common speech,¹⁷ nor does he employ them with the invariability and consistency that we demand of a scholastic vocabulary. Even the terms which have come to be associated particularly with the doctrine of ideas appear frequently with other denotations.¹⁸

As a result there is something wavering, tremulous, and a little unsettled about his phraseology, which tempts the translator and commentator and even the general reader to lend it greater exactitude and definition than it possesses by turning it into good set terms or by substituting modern catch-words. What mischief can be done in this way is illustrated by the reckless substitution of the word *science* for knowledge, or even wisdom.¹⁹ As Huxley remarks in his modest hesitant fashion, "The Platonic philosophy is probably the grandest example of the unscientific use of the imagination extant."²⁰ Quite so; the better the scientist the worse the philosopher.²¹ Would also in addition to *scientific* we might forswear, in speaking of Plato, all cant of *naturalistic*, *materialistic*, and what not, to the advantage of our thinking as well as of our English. It is imperative, however, to be wary of such expressions as *substance*, *reality*, *essence*, *reason*, to say nothing of *matter*, whose significance has so altered in the course of the centuries that their meaning for Plato involves an exposition of his entire philosophy. In short there is a constant temptation to force him verbally into a straiter garment than that which he actually wore and to cramp the freedom and flexibility of utterance which is not the least of his qualities as a moralist and philosopher, and which serves to moderate and humanize even his digressions into metaphysics.²²

Well, to turn a long lane at last, if this view of the Platonic dialogue is correct—if it is indeed an independent tableau from the drama of the ideal life of contemplation, devoted to the inspection of a single phase or aspect of reality; then it makes little difference in what order the dialogues are

¹⁷ Like αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό and τὸ τί ἐστὶ.

¹⁸ εἶδος as late at all events as the sixth book of the *Republic*, 504a, while the *Timaeus* presents the curious anomaly of an amorphous idea, ἀνόρατον εἶδος τι καὶ ἄμορφον, *Timaeus*, 51a. Cf. the use of ἰδέα unspecialized in the *Theaetetus*, late as that is, 184d and 203c.

¹⁹ ταῦτόν ἄρα ἐπιστήμη καὶ σοφία, *Theaetetus*, 145e. Even at his most rationalistic Plato is concerned less for science in our sense than epistemology.

²⁰ Preface to *Hume*.

²¹ Notwithstanding the immediate Cambridgean reaction. But always in extremes!

²² As an example of what can be done with the hard and fast system of translation of which I am speaking, apply it, just for fun, to Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, III, xiv, 2—τὸ δὲ ὄψον αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ ἐσθλόντα—immediately followed as it is by a mention of λόγος, which ought to be as good as a nod to a pedant. Though seriously I often wonder whether we are not forcing Plato's hand as badly and more often than we think by just such abuses of interpretation.

read—and the less so, since he who reads them at all is likely to read the greater of them more than once and in more than one connection. For the student and even for the general reader the advantages of following Plato's development are evident. And yet for reading and even for study the chronological order has serious drawbacks too. Not only does it break up the logical sequence of ideas; for Plato was not a patient man and was prone to revenge himself upon his more intractable subjects by turning his back upon them temporarily whenever they threatened to become unmanageable, so that the arrangement by approximate date of composition, while it gives effect to his variety and versatility, is inconsequent and in so far confusing. But what is more damaging, it does violence to his spirit—his faith in philosophy as a way of life as well as his conception of the dialogue as a representation of that life, a kind of moral drama. Hence I prefer for my part a reading that will take some account of these motives. And if this grouping differs little from the usual and popular, the coincidence only goes to show how successful he has been for all his fits and starts in communicating his intention, having as he did to realize it first for himself.

To this end the dialogues may be sorted into the following sets. There are first the biographical dialogues, as I may be allowed to call them for distinction; I mean those that appear to make a point of characterizing Socrates with peculiar intimacy and fidelity—the *Apology*, the *Crito*, and the *Phædo*. The second set or series consists of the moral dialogues or the dialogues of the virtues—prominently the *Charmides*, the *Protagoras*, the *Gorgias*, and the *Thrasymachus*, to isolate under this title the first book of the *Republic* from the remaining books which belong in the same compartment with it, though giving a different turn to the virtue of justice with which they all have to do nominally. Another and third group will comprise the dialogues of the ideas—say, the *Meno*, the *Symposium*, and the *Phædrus*; while the metaphysical dialogues make up the fourth—a rather ragged classification of the *Parmenides*, to which the discussion of the ideas serves as a sort of transition, the *Theætetus*, the *Sophist*, the *Statesman*, the *Philebus*, and the *Timæus*, which is metaphysical in method, mythical or symbolic though it may be in spirit. And finally, existing in apparent isolation, stands the *Laws* like a pile of terminal stones or boundary. With these major dialogues are associated their minors, like the *Euthyphro* and the *Laches*, which may be made to serve the purpose of notes, addenda, and the like, and which may be integrated with the appropriate series wherever they seem particularly pertinent or instructive.

For Plato, as a companion of Socrates and himself at heart a philosopher as well as a poet, it was only natural to look upon the master who had inspired him as the fitting exemplar of that life of the spirit to which

he had been converted from the "art" of the day and to make him the protagonist of that philosophic drama which his genius was early prompting him to write in demonstration of the faith which they had in common. On this account the three dialogues which purport to detach more or less realistically the person of Socrates and which refer to certain verifiable moments of his life—his trial, his imprisonment, and his death—come to have a sort of introductory priority or precedence as compared with the others. It is unfortunate, on the whole, that the term *Socratic* has not been reserved for these three compositions—the *Apology*, the *Crito*, and the *Phædo*²³—exclusively; they are concerned so manifestly to illustrate the Socratic life:—Such is the nature of the philosopher²⁴ as Plato understood it; in such manner should he live; above all in such manner should he die. On the contrary it is not impossible that we have cause to congratulate ourselves on the failure of the *Philosopher*, which though projected was never realized, if it was intended to sophisticate or subtilize that stalwart advocate of good sense as its neighbors of the metaphysical or methodological period, the *Sophist* and the *Politician*, would lead us to suspect. However that may be, I like to prefix the *Euthyphro* to these three biographical dialogues after the fashion of a prologue partly because of its dramatic time and partly because of its subject, which relates it with the indictment of the *Apology*, though strictly it takes its place in the next group—and to affix the *Symposium*, not merely for its vivid evocation of Socrates in his more festal habit, but capitably for the inebriate tribute of Alcibiades, the apostate, bearing involuntary witness against himself—in *vino veritas*.

And there is one arrangement of the dialogues so curious that it is worth mentioning by the way, where I must pass over others in silence. I refer to Munk's chronology in accordance with the relative age of Socrates in his several confrontations. But even if all the dialogues were "dated" unmistakably after this fashion, it is hardly to be supposed that such an order would be very significant; it would place the *Parmenides* at the head of the procession, which would close, of course, with the *Phædo*, the *Symposium* remaining where it is now—somewhere near the middle, say about 416 B. C. All that is of particular note in such consideration is the circumstance that the dialogues seem to crowd dramatically about Socrates' trial and death, the *Theætetus*, for example, being "dated" also by the arraignment. Though the fact is not extraordinary in itself, yet by way of exhausting all the possibilities it might not be wholly without interest

²³ Again I ignore the discussion of the ideas in the *Phædo*, which may be looked upon from this point of view as an accident of the date of its composition.

²⁴ The νεῦρα φιλοσόφου, in Epictetus' phrase: *Diatribes*, II, 8, 29.

to see how such a "derangement" would look if consistently carried out.

However that may be, if we continue as we began, disregarding chronology altogether and reading for the dramatic logic alone, as nearly as may be, the passage from the first or biographical to the second or moral group is easy and natural enough. No matter when they were written it is apparently Plato's intention in these essays to ventilate certain views and even theses of his master. Their general theme is virtue or perhaps just that spiritual justice or righteousness of the good man whom no evil can touch, alive or dead, into which the single virtues melt and are absorbed—the piety of the *Euthyphro* (which has thus a double content in my mind), the courage of the *Laches*, the sophrosyne of the *Charmides*, and the narrower political or civic justice of the good citizen and ruler, over which the dispute in the *Republic* begins and which constitutes the subject of the first book and suggests its titular separation from the others under the name of *Thrasymachus*.

Of all these virtues and of all virtue at large the most obstinate and insidious enemies, in the eyes of Plato, as perhaps of Socrates, were the Sophists—the more dangerous by reason of the fairness of their professions and promises. That the appellation is a kind of Procrustean or omnibus term their rehabilitators have had no difficulty in showing, so diverse the characters and teachings of those designated thereby, though none the less, if we are to rely upon the evidence—and it is about the only sentiment which Plato and the Athenian *bourgeois* had in common—unanimously subversive of private and public integrity. In clearing the way for the Socratic ethic which went before his own, it is not surprising, therefore, that Plato should run foul of this gentry sooner or later as his leader is represented as doing also. Hence the space devoted in these moral dialogues to what may be called the anti-Sophistic elenchus. That their favorite instruments of seduction were rhetoric and art may partially account for Plato's animosity against these subjects—together with the fact that he was himself an æsthetic apostate. For though the elder Sophists (like the Socratic theses which they debated) properly belonged to the fifth century, it is not to be supposed that their current appeal in Plato's day was purely dramatic or even historical. The circumstance with which he treats them shows that their influence must have been prolonged into his own time. They had their heirs, of course;²⁵ while their symbolic importance as impersonating the persistent forms of a-moralism was, as it

²⁵ Compare Isocrates' discrimination of the good and the bad teachers in *De Permutatione*, 99 and following. To be sure he uses the term *Sophists* in the good old connotation in contrast with the pretenders. But Plato would probably have lumped them all together under the one designation, granting at most that some might not be so bad as others.

still is, tremendous. The Sophists and the charlatans are always with us. And had they not been, and were they not still when Plato wrote, confounded with Socrates by the general public in a monstrous complicity from which it was obligatory to vindicate his memory? In fact some of the Socratics were by that time hardly to be distinguished from them—at least in Plato's eyes.

From the dialogues strongly marked by the presence of this anti-Sophistic polemic it is convenient, it seems to me, to set off the other members of the group—the *Euthyphro*, or "Piety," the *Laches*, or "Courage," and the *Charmides*, or "Sophrosyne." These latter are united into an association of their own by their common anxiety for the Socratic identification of virtue with knowledge, which appears, if I may use the figure, as a species of minor intrigue or sub-plot, for it is a poor dialogue that handles but one theme. The *Lesser Hippias*, whether authentic or not, deserves a place, on account of its treatment of the same problem, with these other discussions, at least in the modest rôle of a scholium or appendix, particularly as it has a rather interesting bearing upon the modern sense for the subject.

One wonders sometimes that Plato was not content to assert that the knowledge which is wisdom is—if not virtue—a virtue in itself, as indeed it is and a rare one at that. Perhaps the manner in which the problem was transmitted, and was still a living issue to his generation, precluded such a summary solution. For undoubtedly in Socrates' mind the virtues were more or less technological and involved a knowing how as well as what. But that some such further notion of the virtue of wisdom as such was fermenting in Plato's mind is clear enough from his increasingly persistent efforts, through the *Euthyphro* and the *Laches* to their culmination in the *Charmides*, not, indeed, to demonstrate the virtue of knowledge exactly, but to condition morality somehow upon it almost as though every virtue were a variety or species of wisdom. As a matter of fact, in the *Charmides* he comes very near a positive conclusion to this effect. At least he leaves the reader pretty well convinced that sophrosyne consists substantially with the knowledge of one's own measure. It is this obvious advance in the development of the idea, together with the relative maturity of the argument, which leads me to place the dialogue after rather than before the *Laches*.

Now, it is just the point of the *Lesser Hippias* that it does assert this virtue of knowledge unconditionally—maintaining paradoxically but consistently that the deliberate liar is morally superior, by virtue of his knowledge, to the unconscious liar, who lies through ignorance, not knowing

the true from the false.²⁶ And at the same time it seems to brand the apparent paradox as an illusion of that modern and romantic casuistry which is forever trying to make the intention go bail for the act, to condone the deed at the instance of the motive. Still what can be more hopeless morally than the man who is unable to distinguish right and wrong? There must be something singularly obtuse or perverse in a generation which insists upon exonerating the wrong-doer on the score of his ignorance, even entrusting their lives and their fortunes to his bungling mismanagement on the ground and for the reason that he knows no better! To be sure the Greek had his casuistry too, which was busy in offering his wit in extenuation of his vices. But then the Greek was an intellectualist while we are sentimentalists; and that, no doubt, is the end of it; for how else is to be explained our rooted suspicion of understanding as a people and our tenderness for the fool and his folly in spite of our lip service to education?

On the whole, then, whatever the authorship and the execution of the *Lesser Hippias*, its spirit and its contribution are not too un-Socratic to disqualify it for serving as an epilogue to the discussion of the virtues in their relation to knowledge. With regard to the three dialogues that are unquestionably authentic, they are united among themselves by another tie—their patent preoccupation with definition. It is an interest which falls into abeyance with the *Protagoras*, but comes to the fore again in the first book of the *Republic* and yet again in the *Theatetus* and the *Sophist*.

There is, however, a better reason for referring particularly to the first book of the *Republic* at this juncture. Not only does it evince the same concern for definition as the *Laches* and the *Charmides*, it also on the strength of the bout with Thrasymachus participates with the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias* in their direct attack upon Sophistry, whatever name it goes by, and in addition seems bent, in distinction from the other books of the *Republic*, upon completing the tale of the cardinal virtues by a treatment of justice as a correlative of piety, courage, and sophrosyne rather than in the later sense as their integrator on general principle. Viewed in this perspective this first book becomes a kind of intermediary between the *Charmides* and the *Protagoras*. Possibly it belongs here or hereabouts by date of composition. At all events it does no manner of harm to multiply the associations of a dialogue.

Of the three members of the sub-group or section whose characteristics I have been so hastily sketching, the most engaging is by all odds the *Char-*

²⁶ The deliberate liar, if there be any such, since no man does wrong deliberately! Xenophon argues the same thesis in a rather different way. [*Mem.* IV, ii, 19. But then cf. the Διῶσι Λόγους.]

mides, for its setting, its subject-matter, and its tone. For sheer charm there are very few of the dialogues which surpass it. Its treatment, while simple and elegant, is serious and mature. And though it is classed as one of the dubitative or epochic discussions (to adapt a Skeptic term) yet, as I have said, it leaves the impression that sophrosyne consists in knowing one's own measure and ensuing that knowledge agreeably with the thesis that no man does wrong wittingly. Such is the position to which Plato returns in the *Republic*; and if it seems to confound sophrosyne with justice, it is into the higher justice of the sound and noble soul that Plato tends, since virtue is one, to run all the virtues. And though Socrates himself continues to exercise a skeptic reserve to the very close of the dialogue, he does so because the conclusion has come to be entangled with certain assumptions—in particular the assumption that happiness attaches to virtue—which he thinks too important to be taken for granted and which, as a matter of fact, he undertakes to establish later. And it is in the course of this attempt that he finds the Sophists, the Expediency Men of the time, like lions in his path.

In this manner the *Charmides* leads into that section of the moral group which I have distinguished as the anti-Sophistic—the *Protagoras*, the *Gorgias*, and the *Thrasymachus*, to which should be added as a by-play, or possibly a preface, the *Euthydemus*. Their content is so imbedded with Plato's moral philosophy that it would be impossible, if not impertinent, to discuss them in detachment. They are all directed in their main issue to the final consolidation of virtue or righteousness with happiness (εὐδαιμονία), as I must call it for the time being in default of a better English term and in anticipation of a definition, though it may not be amiss to notice that this happiness or eudaemony is quite independent of pleasure in the ordinary sense and is not identical on the one hand with content or self-satisfaction in the worldly signification usual to those terms, or yet on the other hand with beatitude or blessedness in the Christian acceptance, being more moral and intellectual than the latter and more religious than the former.

The *Protagoras*, or the Sabbath of the Sophists, posing Hippias and Prodicus as well as the titular character, propounds two problems: can virtue be taught? and, is virtue one? The former is an extension of the previous question, is virtue knowledge? For as knowledge it can be taught; otherwise, not. And yet the second question of the *Protagoras* is answered by the suggestion that all the virtues communicate in knowledge; while the first question is left, with apparent inconsequence, as a quandary, despite the fact that on the principle developed an affirmative answer would seem to be indicated. In extenuation of the absurdity of

such an outcome, however, there are several more or less obvious considerations. The characteristic Socratic pose consistently maintained hitherto is that of the ironic know-nothing whose office it is to test the foundations of opinion, however imposing the superstructure. The elenchus has two arms; what blame if Socrates continues as he has been doing to use the left in this emergency against the clique of Sophists immediately confronting him? The thesis that virtue is teachable was as indispensable to the Sophistic propaganda then as it is now—and is a concession that can never be granted them. There is more to virtue, if not to knowledge, than appears in the pedagogy of the Sophists, more than can be expressed in the formula, as we put it to-day, that education is a science. It is but a half-truth as so stated; and in the hands of Protagoras, or even a Prodicus, to say nothing of a Hippias, a very dangerous and even fatal half-truth indeed. Virtue consists not with the kind of knowledge that they possessed or imparted. It is not only wisdom; it is somehow happiness too, as Plato had already begun to see in the *Charmides*. And it is the deeper implications of this dawning idea that he reserves very properly against Protagoras and his associates.

To an account of this connotation of virtue as righteousness, then, Plato addresses himself directly in the *Gorgias*. In spite of apparent side-issues and digressions the event is clear. For once Socrates commits himself, now that the time is ripe, to an affirmation, and in the final paragraphs, with their strength of the last judgment, summarizes in so many words the results of the discussion. But again, before he can reach a decision, he finds the Sophists barring the way. This time it is Gorgias, the belletrist, with his hypocrite rhetoric,²⁷ and Callicles, the “naturalist,” with his unabashed sensationalism, who dispute his passage.²⁸ As against Gorgias, abetted by his pupil Polus, he denies the legitimacy of his “art.” It is but practice—to play upon the Elizabethan sense of the word—or craft—to play upon our own word—it is empiric and imposture; at best it is a trade, not art. Its sole science is amathia, the assumption of a knowledge which it does not possess; its hope is in the gullibility of the ignorant; its profit in the masking and disguising of vice and the counterfeiting of virtue:—there is no health in it. Against Callicles, on the other hand, he asserts, now that the way is cleared, his fundamental tenet—the concurrence of truth, beauty, and goodness in happiness as contrasted with

²⁷ I have not overlooked the distinction which Plato draws between Sophist and Rhetorician in the *Gorgias*, 520b; but for practical purposes I disregard it in accordance with Plato's more common usage; it is irrelevant to the present issue.

²⁸ It is difficult to translate these terms without ambiguity. The association is suggestive of Nietzsche's distinction of *schlecht* and *böse*. The Greek words are τὸ ἰσχυρότερον, τὸ κρείττον, τὸ βέλτιον.—*Gorgias*, 488c-d.

the Sophistic coincidence of strength, superiority, and excellence with prosperity.

"Among the many statements we have made, while all the others have been refuted, this alone is unshaken—that doing wrong is more to be avoided than suffering it; that above all a man should study not to seem but to be good both in private and public. . . . Take my advice, therefore, and follow me where, if you once arrive, you will be happy both in life and death. . . . And allow anyone to condemn you as a fool and to treat you spitefully, if he wishes . . . for you will come to no harm, if you are a really good and righteous man, practicing virtue. . . . Let us therefore take as our guide the doctrine now disclosed which indicates to us that this way of life is best, to live and die in the practice of justice and every other virtue."²⁹ In such wise he justifies his reserves of the *Charmides* and the *Protagoras* at the same time that he discloses his own position.

The *Gorgias*—in Renouvier's just expression, "*certainement un des plus beaux et rares ouvrages des littératures de tous les temps et de tous les peuples*"³⁰—is Plato's masterpiece. It contains not only the Platonic credo but the essentials of Platonism as well. In discriminating between pleasures and in disengaging happiness from material prosperity and attaching it to virtue, the dialogue seats morality upon a firm and intelligible foundation. In this respect Plato never surpassed or outdistanced it; he could do no more than develop and reinforce it. If anything, the first book of the *Republic*—sometimes called the *Thrasymachus*—would mark a retrogression, as I have already noticed, by its insistence upon the particular and singular justice of a part rather than of the whole man, if there were not some reason to believe that the first sketch of this one book antedates the rest of the work. In compensation the first part of the second book, with its recognition of the absolute self-sufficiency of that integral justice which is the health of the whole soul—that virtue which is one—may perhaps be counted an actual advance.³¹ To be sure, the acknowledgment is made by Adeimantus hypothetically as a thesis for demonstration. But what of that, since Plato accepts the challenge and assumes the burden of proof?

Such is the sense of the *Republic*. Ostensibly it is a similitude; actually it is a *double entendre* (in the literal sense of the words), and not without ambiguity for the modern mind as the writer appears to become entangled in his own figure. Taken as a symbol it is a magnification, the majuscule or capital of the inner or spiritual city, the city of the soul.³² Taken literally it is an image of virtue or justice in man as a social

²⁹ *Gorgias*, 527b-e. Substantially Lamb's translation.

³⁰ *Philosophie Analytique de l'Histoire*, t. I, p. 456.

³¹ *Republic*, 367c.

³² ἡ ἐαυτοῦ πόλις, *Republic*, 592a.

being. On the whole, it may be said roughly to seek a solution to the problem of the happy state or society as that in which its members are regulated by the measure of justice. What confusion there is may be explained by the fact that our double justice—the personal and the social, the moral and the ethical—did not exist for Plato; for him the good state was the state of the good man.³³

That Plato's doctrine of ideas is affiliated with his moralism is a reasonable supposition. Certainly the ideas themselves, in their first intention, are not a necessity of epistemology but of morality. The originals have all something of the character of moral standards. Piety, courage, sophrosyne, justice—even phronesis, or intelligence, and beauty connote an obligation, as does all knowledge; they are at least suggestive of what we should call duty. If virtue does not subsist by favor either of man or of gods, it must have being somehow in itself. In this light the dialogues of the ideas appear as supplementary to the dialogues of the virtues. And with a little good will the *Greater Hippias* may be taken, together with the *Euthyphro*, as an introduction. It still holds to some of the earlier threads: it is intolerant, in the same old fashion, of sophistry masquerading as wisdom, and culminates with the confusion of Hippias, the "knowledgeable"; it is equally ardent in the pursuit of definition and equally inconclusive in the upshot. But in particular, while simple and plain-spoken, it is conversant with certain turns of phrase and thought peculiar to the doctrine and is familiar with the general notion of participation.³⁴ It is a sprightly dialogue too, whoever wrote it. One might do worse than to read it before proceeding to the *Meno*, the *Symposium*, and the *Phædrus*, with which dialogue the *Phædo* is to be properly affiliated.

While the subject of these dialogues is too vast for this sort of cursory analysis, the ideas in their broader significance may be loosely defined as those lovely forms (μορφαί), those beautiful apparitions (εἶδη, ἰδέαι) of reality to the soul by whose assistance it is enabled in some sort to make the world of sense intelligible so far as it happens to resemble them. Their presence to the mind is explained in the *Meno* by the supposition of reminiscence. Use and wont notwithstanding, I hesitate to speak of it as a doctrine; for taken literally it carries little or no conviction. It is rather a mythic expression, a figure, for the common experience wherein our happier conceptions seem, not to be invented or excogitated, but discovered—or

³³ I should like to cite as in point an open letter from one of our great American politicians, reputed a statesman, before a late Presidential election, urging the voters to let the moral issues alone, and to direct their attention, where it belonged, to economic ones.

³⁴ For example, αὐτὸ τὸ καλὸν ὅτι ἐστί, 286d; and αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν, ᾧ καὶ τᾶλλα πάντα κοσμεῖται καὶ καλὰ φαίνεται, 289d.

rather, recovered, so that the perception of truth appears as a recollection of something known long since and lost awhile.³⁵ It is a kind of symbolism akin to that which distinguishes the *Symposium*, and the *Phædrus* among the other writings of Plato; and as a characteristic it marks the close of the period in which Plato was able to rest satisfied with the spiritual apprehension of truth, untroubled by rationalistic misgivings.

As for the *Symposium* and the *Phædrus*, they are directed rather to the process and discipline whereby the soul may come to a better appreciation of these divine manifestations, the ideas. With the *Apology* they are probably the best and most widely known of the dialogues and are of themselves mainly responsible for the romantic Plato, the mystic and ecstatic Plato of common report. Like all symbolic or allegorical presentments they are, it must be acknowledged, fluid and elusive, as it were images or reflections in water; the worst that can be said of them, even by one who sympathizes rather with the severity of the moralist, is that they are poetry. Nevertheless they have, each of them, a solid core of actuality. No more dramatic representation of life and character was ever written than the *Symposium*. The *Phædrus*, on the contrary, is a curious medley, with its idyllic setting under the plane tree, its ode and palinode, its rhetorical criticism, its passing comments on current and contemporaneous authors, and its lofty myth of the charioteer and splendid vision of the celestial clime (τὸν ὑπερουράνιον τόπον, 247e), the region of truth (τὸ ἀληθείας πεδῖον, 248b) and the abode of the ideas.

It is at some such point as this—perhaps, with the very vision of the *Phædrus*—that Plato's philosophy culminates. Not that the remainder of his course is unilluminated; but that the spirit—I am tempted to call it the justice—which makes him what he uniquely is, that balance of faculties which constitutes his greatness as a moralist has been disturbed. His respect for the rights of good sense (the κοινὰ ἔννοια of which Plutarch makes so much as a good academician against the Stoics), his appreciation of actuality, his faith in insight—in a word his feeling for the just measure begins to fail him; and he inclines more and more to prefer "intellection" before intelligence (dianoia before noesis) and to put his trust in that "false secondary power" of the reason which ignores or neglects the primary distinctions of consciousness in the interests of an artificial logical consistency. The problem of the one and the many degenerates into the "Pythagorean" dogma of the "mixture" or "composition"; the doctrine of

³⁵ For the romantic notion of truth and its apprehension compare Emerson: "When good is near you, when you have life in yourself, it is not by any known or accustomed way; you shall not discern the footprints of any other; you shall not see the face of man; you shall not hear any name:—*the way, the thought, the good shall be wholly strange and new.*"—*Self-Reliance*. The italics are mine.

ideas is metamorphosed into a grammar of predication and a logic of categories (γέννη); the nature of truth and error, of reality and unreality (the very foundation of Plato's dualism) becomes hopelessly involved in the umbrageous mazes of ontology; definition is stripped to a skeleton of dichotomy—the whole Platonic ideism totters precariously on the brink of idealism—what we call idealism.³⁶ It is with this Plato and his works that the epistemologists and the whole busy army of rationalists of one stripe and another find their affair. But for the reader whose interest is in the moral interpretation of life a hasty summary of this period should here suffice.

That Plato was more or less subject to distraction in a manner which makes him appear inferior to Socrates in the article of character is a fact which his admirers have to make the best of. It is accountable, to a certain extent, for his unsystematic treatment of his ideas—fortunate though in this instance we may esteem the consequence; and to this extent we have been reckoning with it in following the windings and meanders of his philosophy. To the impatience of youth and the impetuosity of manhood some degree of desultoriness is excusable. But Plato's two visits to Syracuse as a sexagenarian, in the fourth decade of the century, are another matter. To the former it is probable that he sacrificed the *Theætetus*, upon which, there is reason to suppose, he was working at the time, and whose spirit he never succeeded in recapturing after his return to Athens. But be this as it may, is it unreasonable to see in these two inconsequential excursions an index to his state of mind, corroborated as it is by the unhappy exposures of the seventh epistle—a momentary vacancy of vision, a consequent vacillation or self-distrust and a susceptibility to irrelevant suggestion, which his lack of any great popular success or general influence—let us say with his *Republic*—may have tended to aggravate?

Under the circumstances, then, since his entire philosophy—a practical moral philosophy and way of life—had come to depend finally on knowledge, it is hardly astonishing that he should have felt a certain anxiety for the cornerstone of his structure and that a teacher, the head of the Academy, exposed to objection and confrontation, he should have found himself driven to seek, over and above the inarticulate testimony of the spirit, some rational account of this knowledge upon which he had built his house. Nor does it seem improbable either that the searching and

³⁶ With these facts in the immediate foreground it strikes me as not wholly unnatural to feel more sympathy than irritation with Huit (*La Vie et l'Œuvre de Platon*: see t. II, pp. 261-311 in particular) in his summary rejection of the *Parmenides*, the *Sophist*, and the *Politician* from the Platonic canon; the scenery would be so much more regular and comfortable without them.

expounding of the philosophers his predecessors which his duties imposed upon him, should have confirmed him in this rationalizing vein. So Parmenides, Heraclitus, Pythagoras, even Democritus appear, in the evidence of his own writings, to have swayed, if not to have shaken, his own mind successively or alternately. And since to Plato knowledge was essentially knowledge of the ideas, the *Parmenides*, which impartially covers the difficulties of the doctrine, may as well be read in advance of the dialogues which I have huddled together under the title of metaphysical.

Considered light-heartedly, the *Parmenides* is one of the funniest things in philosophy—the youthful Socrates, the future champion of sound sense and right reason, taking a lesson, open-mouthed, in ontological rigmarole from the old Eleatic dialectician, in the company of Zeno, the subtle juggler of apory and paradox! And what is the sense or the symbolism of Socrates' posing not merely as one of "the friends of the ideas" but as their responsible proponent? Is it part of the comedy of the situation? Or a pretext, in compliment to Parmenides, to run the ideas into his harbor and under his guns? Seriously, however, the dialogue does seem to dispose, in ironic wise, of the Parmenidean unity, as the *Theætetus* supplementing the *Cratylus* reckons in a corresponding portion with the Heraclitean mutable, which is, to all intents and purposes, a multiplicity or many. Whatever the force of the argument as such, the impression finally results somehow that neither of these two principles, the absolute and the flux, being and becoming, is adequate individually as a complete account of reality in the extensive sense of the term.

By this time—with the second part of the *Theætetus*, to be more exact—the Platonic *genre* has begun to lose its character. Philosophy appears no longer as a way of life capable of dramatic representation. Dialogue and dialectic have parted company; discussion is supplanted by disquisition. The responses of the auditory become scanty and perfunctory or lapse altogether; while like "an imperfect actor on the stage," the old inquisitor himself "is put beside his part" or elbowed aside by some docent or other with a cut and dried system or *Methodenlehre*. The genial pursuit of truth with its companionable give and take has ceased forever. The Socratic conversation has stiffened into a set and apathetic convention.

For the rest, the *Theætetus*, apart from the suggestive conceit of Socrates' midwifery and its attack upon Protagoras, is overshadowed by what has now grown to be pretty much of an obsession with Plato—the problem of epistemology. Not that he ever finds a positive answer to the question, what is knowledge. The only answer possible to his philosophy he has already given in the *Symposium* and the *Phædrus*; for "it is not definable like the sciences; but after being long brooded and dwelt upon it springs

up of a sudden in the soul, as light kindles on the throbbing of a fire, and there maintains itself." The pity of it is that he should have wasted so much of his precious time in searching for a definition that when found would have been at best only a definition of science after all. For the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* too, though their bearing is quite different from that of the *Theatetus*, betray the same preoccupation. It is apparent in the dichotomy, that abortive attempt at methodology, peculiar to the two later dialogues, to say nothing of the curious quirk given to the discussion of truth and error in the *Sophist*, as well as in the *Theatetus*, whereby the contradiction of reality and unreality is rationalized into the complement of some and other in the predication of being and not being. As for the *Philosopher*, the final member of the trilogy (or tetralogy, if the *Theatetus* is to be counted in) which was to draw, in contrast with the *Sophist* and in extension of the *Statesman*, the portrait of the genuine ruler or legislator, no trickster or bungler, but master of the royal art, the kingly man who knows and is able (in Carlyle's dubious but suggestive etymology)—as for him, it may be that in default of such a rationalistic definition of knowledge or truth Plato felt in his mood of disappointment too heavily handicapped to undertake him. Or did he hesitate in despair at last of the philosopher's competence to deal with the vice, intolerance, and folly of this sensible world? It is inconceivable that he could have voiced the doubt so eloquently as he has done in the *Theatetus* and elsewhere³⁷ if it had not lain so cold and heavy on his old age.

Defeated, then, in his attempt at a "critical" philosophy—a failure to which he frankly confesses in the *Philebus*³⁸—he drops, with his usual impatience at difficulties, the plan for a *Philosopher* altogether, and turning from knowledge itself to its subject-matter or content, launches in the *Timæus* upon an account of creation, the metaphysical kernel of which is discernible through the account of the mixture (τὸ μίκτον) as it is figured in the *Philebus*.³⁹ Call the *Timæus* myth or metaphor or what you will, there is still a doubt in my mind whether Plato for the nonce was not the dupe of Empedocles and Democritus.⁴⁰ To the Plato of the *Meno* and the *Phædo*, the Plato of the ideas and of the reminiscence, for whom the mystery of being lay within, in the soul of man, absolute commencements were at best absurdity; and it is tempting to ascribe to the Plato of the *Timæus* a consistent sentiment: "That for your physical genesis! But since there is no certainty about becoming, nor any sense or knowledge,

³⁷ *Theatetus*, 172-177.

³⁸ *Philebus*, 59a and b.

³⁹ *Philebus*, 23-27.

⁴⁰ See Eva Sachs: *Die fünf platonischen Körper*.

let us conceive of actuality genetically, as men are ever prone to think of nature, in this patricular way, as if and as though.”⁴¹ And yet agreeable as such a subterfuge is, still in view of the sources and the chronology of the dialogue, it strains my credulity to believe that Plato did not attach a positive or even scientific value to this cosmology, as the last recourse, it may be, of his rationalizing speculations. To think otherwise is to misrepresent the character of this particular stage of his development. Particularly in view of the renewing ascendancy of science after its “bankruptcy” in the fifth century it is difficult to see the *Timæus* otherwise than as an attempt on the part of its author to produce at last a *Natur-Philosophie*, a complete deductive account of natural phenomena. The speculations and experiments of Archytas, Theodorus, Theætetus, and Eudoxus—the comprehension of the five regular bodies, the discovery of irrational numbers, the foundation of stereometry, the deduction of the form of the earth and perhaps of its mobility—were all of a nature to arouse Plato’s curiosity, and in his state of mind to stimulate his faculty of generalization and synthesis. How otherwise are we to account for the final transformation whereby the ideas incline to become a kind of concepts which can be formulated as number—that is to say as ratios comparable after their kind with our H_2O ’s and $\frac{1}{2}MV^2$ ’s?⁴² No, whatever you may make of this period scientifically, it is impossible to dispose of it philosophically otherwise than as a period of gradual though fairly constant decline.

Nor is the *Laws*, at the end of the long procession of dialogues, exceptional in any way or out of order. Taken as a whole—if what is properly a collection of remains, a *Nachlass*, may be so taken—it represents in another field the rationalism of Plato’s final period: as compared with the *Republic* it is so unmistakably practical and mundane in temper that it amounts to little less than a palinode of the earlier dialogue. What has become of the gold and silver men who graced his earlier polity, and of the higher education which was to elevate and sustain them? Where is the noble aristocracy of philosophers, legislators, and guardians of the commonwealth? For these regimented colonists of the *Laws* are all alike and of one sort, without distinction, hence without justice—as it were the third estate, the estate of concupiscent or average sensual men, drawn as a *pis-aller* from the obscurity in which the *Republic* had left it—a Platonic Philistia. To the impartial reader the main interest of the compilation, for which we have to thank the pious cares of Plato’s famulus or pupil

⁴¹ Compare *Philebus*, 59a.

⁴² I say nothing further of the Platonic doctrine of mathematical figures and ideal numbers as it may be inferred from Aristotle; whatever it amounts to it lies at all events outside the dialogues. See Léon Robin: *La Théorie platonicienne des Idées et des Nombres d’après Aristotle*.

Philippus, must consist in detached sallies and *aperçus*, of which there is naturally no dearth, for the voice is still the voice of Plato, though some of his accents, it may be, will sound sufficiently disconcerting to the student of his prime.⁴³

Such, then, is the way in which I read the dialogues—or rather, think of them when I think of them all together and in the mass. That they do not form a sequence like the chapters of a book, that they are not severally links in a chain, requires no demonstration. And it is this method, or want of method, of composition which compels us, when we would examine Plato's thought, to sift it somehow or other into topics. Whatever the light behind the medium through which he has chosen to transmit it, it has been broken up and dispersed, as by a kind of literary refraction, into a diversified spectrum of dialogue, from which it is necessary to pick and match the several colors through all their bewildering gradations of hue and shade. His conceptions of immortality, of the soul, of reality; his opinions of rhetoric, art, education; his views of virtue, wisdom, happiness are not revealed completely in a single dialogue or consecutively in any set of dialogues, but must be sought from one to another and composed at the reader's discretion. That the task of organizing all these partial syntheses into a single inclusive and consistent system seems to me impracticable, I have already declared, since I do not believe that such a system existed whole in Plato's head. Still I would not deny that such a construction is possible as a *tour de force*. I would only suggest that it is much more reasonable and more agreeable with the spirit of Plato to look upon these traceries and recollections as images, not so much of a single Platonic idea, as of that one transcendent truth of which Plato's thought itself was but a faceted reflection.

⁴³ For example, the manner in which he compromises the good old Socratic thesis that no man does wrong knowingly.—*Laws*, 860d, *et seq.*

III THE IDEAS

I

Of all Platonic themes the doctrine of ideas is the most profound and serious. Not that I pretend to understand it save in a general way; very likely it is one of those intuitions which are never to be understood exactly even by their author. But I have a suspicion that if I could get to the bottom of it, I should find myself not only at the root of Platonism but of all philosophy and religion as well—perhaps “within the eventual element of calm” itself. So much of stability amid “the wheel and the drift of things” does it seem to promise. How it may be with others I cannot say, but for my own part I am unable to find very much satisfaction in the perpetuity of change, or take any great comfort in the eternity of progress. Even the contemplation of illimitable imperfection and the prospect of unceasing process fail to inspire me with enthusiasm. A life that slips through our fingers moment by moment, a world that shifts uneasily from one inconceivable transformation to another—such contingency, to my mind, carries but slight assurance of reality. It is not that I deny the existence of what we call an outward or extended world, a world of fact or event; what I question is its credibility. Its secret, if it has one, I doubt we shall ever learn. And so we busy ourselves with our little myths and fancies, just as Plato did when he too was at a loss—poetry, art, metaphysics, science. In such a world I can put no greater faith than in the fictions which purport to represent it. It affords me no security or peace; it only fills me with incredulity and misgiving. Nor, indeed, if I may rely upon my own convictions, is this the only world in which I live. I have at least intimations of another, not of my own making either, for I must claim no greater originality for consciousness than for sense. They are both witnesses, as both worlds are presentations. Only as the eye perceives the visible, may the mind discern the intelligible. But the intelligible has at least the advantage for me of being the more authentic and trustworthy. Such, as I understand it, is the teaching of Plato in his doctrine of *ideas*; such, its gravity and consequence.

“Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.”

“Denke dass die Gunst der Musen
Unvergängliches verheisst,
Den Gehalt in deinem Busen
Und die Form in deinem Geist.”

When it is remembered that Plato began his career as a moralist and so continued for the greater part of his life; that he turned logician and metaphysician only in what are admittedly his very late if not his latest dialogues; that in the dialogues which are generally acknowledged to intervene between the two periods he is occupied with the ideas—when these considerations are mustered and reviewed, it would seem like the veriest chronological blunder to search for the origin of his *ideas* amid the logical and metaphysical speculations which engrossed his declining years. The evidences point so unanimously to another antecedent. Even his dabbings in logic and metaphysics and rationalism in general, when viewed in their natural perspective, appear but the result of the perplexities of the moralist, as witness his constant references, when engaged in such discussions, to difficulties already incurred and admitted. And this documentary testimony to the moral genesis of the doctrine is confirmed by a recollection of its author's character and situation.

The pre-eminence of Plato is established in his moralism. If anything were needed to prove the ascendancy of the moral motive over his spirit, the *Republic* alone would serve the turn. The projected polity is a moral institution founded upon the moral constitution of the individual and for its advantage and improvement, while the governors or rulers are qualified not merely by the superiority of their moral character but by their knowledge of the good itself as essence or *idea*. In Matthew Arnold's phrase, life was to Plato in all its concerns a moral affair. As a logician and metaphysician he has been surpassed and superseded; as a moralist he belongs in the succession of Æschylus and Sophocles, and that is as much as to say in the great indefectible tradition of human culture.

For an exposition of the views of the two dramatists this is hardly the occasion.¹ It is enough to say, what perhaps no one will feel like disputing when stated in general terms, that their tragedy may be conceived philosophically as an attempt to illustrate the operations of a moral law inherent somehow in the ultimate constitution of reality, if not constituting the ultimate itself. Very likely I should be better advised to call it a principle, since it was thought of neither as a statute nor as a formula, the two notions which we commonly associate with the word *law* to-day. Rather it was looked upon as a character or nature, the nature of the cosmos as the institute and seat of order, and hence itself the principle or essence of that cosmic seemliness and propriety. To be sure, it might find tentative and partial expression in some semi-articulate sense of paramount or "divine" obligation or duty, like Antigone's ἄγραπτα νόμιμα; but on the whole it was not to be comprehended in prescripts or edicts or

¹ I have already discussed the subject at some length in my *Romance and Tragedy*.

to be otherwise defined or circumscribed by words. Indeed, what strikes the reader of Æschylus and Sophocles is in the last resort the atmosphere of baffling and impenetrable mystery with which it is invested.² But for all that it had its evidences. Whoever neglected or omitted to conform to this order or organization—whoever failed, that is, to participate in its nature or virtue—was automatically determined to disaster or destruction. He was unfit and invalid; and his activity was bound to be a source of moral offense and frustration.

Nor, it is only just to remark, are glimpses of such a moral disposition wanting to the “physical” speculations of the early philosophers—the last place where one would be likely to look for them who allowed his mind to be swayed by the tyranny of scholastic names and classifications. To heap up citations would be easy; but one or two should serve the purpose. Take for example that fragment of Anaximander’s in which he declares that “into those things out of which all are generated, into these they decay again, as is meet; for they make reparation and compensation, for their wrong-doing, to one another, according to the order of time.”³ And may I be excused the rather obvious reference to Heraclitus’ observation, “The sun will not overstep his measures; otherwise the Erinyes, the handmaids of Justice, will find him out”?⁴ As a religious teacher Empedocles is not so much to the point, perhaps; still the following fragment is interesting in this connection: “But the law for all extends far and wide through the wide-ruling air and the measureless splendor of heaven.”⁵ But these are adumbrations, or perhaps *reliquiæ*. It took the genius of Æschylus and Sophocles to disentangle the principle from the physical clutter in which it was involved and to apply it to the problem of human happiness and misery. And even they, for all their powers of divination, succeeded in tracing it but darkly through the envelopes of exceptional circumstance and in the dubious fortunes of particular men.

That is the disadvantage of art. At best it is but “the illusion of a higher reality”—but still, as Plato saw, an illusion after all. It may illustrate truth; what it purports to represent are facts, whose authenticity is open to question and whose interpretation is subject to doubt. Its actuality is a fiction; its reality, a similitude. It is only a symbol, and its

² Observe how studiously Plato at a much later and more advanced date declines Adeimantus’ and Glaucon’s invitation to define the good, the supreme moral reality or *idea*.—*Republic*, 506.

³ Diels: *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 2, 9. Cp. Burnet: *Early Greek Philosophy*, 3d ed., p. 52, note 6.

⁴ Bywater, xxix; Diels, 12B, 94; Burnet, p. 135.

⁵ Diels, 21 B, 135; Burnet, p. 225. For the incubation and gestation of these notions I am not here concerned. Anyone who is will find sufficient pasturage for curiosity and amazement in F. M. Cornford’s *From Religion to Philosophy*.

significance is always implicit and equivocal. And yet beneath the mask of Attic tragedy it is possible to detect more than one feature which should put the reader in mind of Plato—the conception of a universal moral frame or structure (and what else is implied by the Platonic terms *form* and *idea*) and of the cosmos as a system existing in view of a supreme or spiritual⁶ good; together with the notion of this moral principle as a kind of essence communicating reality or being to its participants and in its regulative aspects or activity insuring the virtue or order of the universe by the inevitable force of a native bent or propensity.

It may be objected that in what precedes I have been arguing the obvious. Every human being, I may be told, is convinced in his heart of the moral administration of the world. And to a certain extent, perhaps, the reproach is just. But to the popular imagination such policing has usually been done by one or more superhuman beings in their own interest and in accordance with their own will or caprice; it has been pretty much the expediency of the mighty; and with them it has been possible to bargain and compound. With the decline of religion, however—a transitory aberration of the human spirit in any case, I shall probably be assured—the edifice of morality is securely reforming on the foundations of social convention, somewhat after the conception of the Sophists; mankind may have doubts about the day of judgment, but they are certain of public opinion, and the approval or condemnation of their neighbors, with the rewards or punishments accruing. But all this is very different from a faith in an impartial moral constitution or nature, to which all men are as liable as they are to gravitation (whatever that may be) and which they can neither browbeat after the fashion of Thrasymachus nor cajole after that of Euthyphro; it is not a belief in a cosmos fundamentally moral in character and operation. Nor does Matthew Arnold's "power not ourselves that makes for righteousness" bespeak just such a confidence either. Very likely there is a sense of virtue in all but the most debased—or so we are pleased to think. Incredulous as man may be of moral consequences, he will nevertheless recognize and even admire goodness; he will probably, like Polus, consider the state of the just man more respectable, possibly more desirable, than that of the wrong-doer. But this is to make of righteousness an ideal, as Grote seems to think that Plato is trying to do in the *Gorgias*.⁷ And it was in none of these ways that those earlier sages who had the vision conceived of the good. For them it was neither a superstition nor a convention nor an ideal; it was neither incidental nor accidental nor wilful: it was an essential and fatal reality. And it is for this reason—because Plato enters upon this faith and makes

⁶ Such is the sense of the Greek word *divine*.

⁷ See Grote's *Plato*, Chap. XXII.

it his possession—that I have written him in the succession of Æschylus and Sophocles in the place of Euripides, who sold his heritage for a portion of rationalism and took up his dwelling, though the greatest of them, in the tents of the Sophists.

One other name it might have been necessary to interpolate in the series, if Socrates had had the genius or knack of authorship. Perhaps—for it is not impossible that Socrates' philosophical powers have been over-rated. It is so hard to lay hands on the man himself. There is the Socrates of Aristotle, the inventor of definition and "induction;" and the Socrates of Aristophanes, the "meteorologist" or physicist; and there are the Socrates' of Xenophon and Plato, not to say of Antisthenes and Æschines, moralists all of them, however they may differ among themselves. But what are the respective contributions of sitter and painter? It is curious at least that the attempts of the Platonic Socrates at definition are so generally abortive.⁸ Curious, too, that the Xenophontic Socrates deems physical science not only useless but impious,⁹ while the philosophical stock in trade of both the Xenophontic and Platonic Socrates consists of several common-places of fifth century controversy. What transpires through the representations—at least those of Xenophon or Plato—is not so much a philosophy as an influence, not a doctrine but an inspiration.

As a matter of history there are few teachers who have been successful in uniting so many diverse suffrages—Euripides, Æschines, Euclid, Phædo, Xenophon, Aristippus, Antisthenes, Plato himself; Socrates must have had a side, if not several sides, for each of them. Indeed I sometimes wonder whether his various elements did not to some extent balk one another, as the rain flattens the sea and the wind checks the frost. After all, say what you please, there is too often a kind of one-sidedness or immoderation about great achievement, be it what it will; it is seldom the result of a perfect equilibrium. Certainly there must have been a good deal of the rationalist about the man Socrates, or he would never have found so ready an audience in Euripides. That he was hard-headed, shrewd, ironic, skeptical, all his witnesses agree. And if he seems a little naïf, as well, as he does to Aristophanes, the note is not wholly incompatible with the character of rationalism either. The interview with Theodote the courtesan, wherever it comes from, must have been appropriated by Xenophon

⁸ I need refer only to the *Charmides* and the first book of the *Republic* with their defective definitions of sophrosyne and justice; though at the same time it must be added that Socrates occasionally brings off a definition by way of illustration, as in the *Meno*, 75b and 76a. But for that matter, if his chief merit lie in the discovery of definition, why are not the genuine Socratic dialogues, for example, the *Sophistes* and the *Politicus*? Cp. Stenzel: *Studien zur Entwicklung der platonischen Dialektik von Sokrates zu Aristoteles*, pp. 47-48.

⁹ *Memorabilia*, I, iii. Cp. the *Phædo*, 96-100.

for cause.¹⁰ It may seem like caricature; but the impression is rectified by one stroke and another—of a curiosity whetted with inquisitiveness, avid of all kinds of miscellaneous information; the common-sense appetite for odds and ends of knowledge with its vexatious questioning and disarming simplicity—a “picker-up of learning’s crumbs.” Nor was his intellect without astringency either; it is always slightly styptic—a contractile mind, as is illustrated in Antisthenes. Whence his taste for definition—for whatever his dialectic skill, his *penchant* for that sort of exercise cannot be gainsaid. He has a passion for neatness, definiteness, exactness; for the right line and the true edge—for the just level and the plumb. And unfortunately much of Plato’s philosophy was loose and unknit and elastic; it was the price he paid for reality—an extravagance at which Socrates would not unlikely have boggled.

The so-called Socratic theses into which Socrates’ moralism would seem to have knotted itself in accordance with this disposition of his spirit are three or four in number. The questions to which they served as answers were moot questions of the fifth century, the spring-time of Greek rationalism or enlightenment, and subjects of debate particularly among the elder Sophists. It would be surprising if Socrates, being without a system or framework of his own whether by principle or temperament, should not have sought to define his convictions by reference to such “burning questions” of his day, so that the propositions by which he has done so may be taken to reflect, in a manner, his whole moral philosophy. Nor is it any less natural that Plato at the beginning of his career, himself in turn wanting as yet a settled habit of belief, should have picked up such pregnant sentences with the idea of clarifying his own thought in the act of expounding and illustrating his master’s.

Where he innovates and originates it is not always possible to decide with certainty. There are those who would have us believe that the single hand of Plato is at work only in the logic and metaphysics of the latest period. But on the whole it seems unprofitable to attempt to separate decisively the Plato and the Socrates of the dialogues. After his derivation has once been noticed it is saner—certainly it is easier—to look upon the Platonic Socrates as a dramatic character and to follow the thought rather than the thinkers. What discriminations we do make, when we must discriminate within the dialogues themselves, are much better made in the sense of tradition. At best they are only hypothetical and suggested in the interests of a thought to which Plato, in salvaging it, has established an indisputable title, no matter from what port it first sailed. In fact, if I dare express myself to that effect, I think the historical

¹⁰ *Memorabilia*, III, xi.

Socrates' contribution to the dialogues much smaller than we generally like for sentimental reasons to believe—with the exception I have just mentioned in favor of his inspiration.

"Virtue is one," "virtue is knowledge," "virtue is happiness," "virtue can be taught," "no man does wrong willingly"—these maxims named of Socrates, represent at all events Plato's point of departure. That he is not certain as yet in just what manner they are to be taken is evident from the dubitations and contradictions of the earlier dialogues—it is very largely from this source that Socrates has drawn his ironic reputation of the know-nothing;¹¹ he is downright and opinionated enough in Xenophon.¹² It results clearly too from the same premise that in Plato's eyes at least these aphorisms served to formulate the Socratic creed, whatever might be their proper interpretation. There is between them an obvious and matter-of-course connection which could hardly have escaped his notice. If virtue is knowledge—and it certainly presupposes some sort of discrimination, just as knowledge in turn implies and carries an obligation—it must be one and capable in so far of being imparted; while if it ensures well-being or prosperity, as the phraseology of experience seems to argue—to have done well is as ambiguous in English as in Greek—no one will deliberately traverse it save in ignorance of his own interests. But such an argument is wholly superficial. And Plato must have often wondered, even while the voice of Socrates was yet in his ears, what knowledge this is which is virtue; that it is any kind of common or technical knowledge he explicitly denies, Socrates' constant suggestions to the contrary notwithstanding. For us, with our after-information, to answer the question for him is easy enough: knowledge of the *ideas*, we should say, and of the *idea* of good in particular. But it took Plato a great while and a great many steps to reach this conclusion; in a sense his whole philosophy may be viewed as the result of his attempt to solve the problem in its several developments; most of his first and some of the succeeding dialogues are concerned with it specifically. Such is the theme of the *Charmides* and the *Laches*; it underlies the *Protagoras*, the *Euthydemus*, the *Meno*; in short, it was always more or less in possession of Plato's mind. Nevertheless, while this very possibly is the spur which incites his moral speculations, it is not always in his flank. Indeed he can hardly be said to have slighted any of the questions raised by his master. But the subject which gradually comes to predominate over the others and engrosses his interest is rather that of the relationship of virtue and happiness. It is the topic of the *Gorgias* and in a large way of the *Republic*.

¹¹ See *Theatetus*, 150c.

¹² Possibly through the influence of Antisthenes?

If we are to judge from the length of his journey alone, he could not have taken the solution ready-made from Socrates. And in addition there is the character of Socrates to be reckoned with. For Socrates, with his practical prejudices and his good sense, the well-being which was the reward of virtue was not wholly divested of worldly advantage or at least of physical satisfaction,¹³ for the Greeks were naturally men of this world. I will not deny that he had transcended the vulgar notion of material prosperity or that he had discriminated among pleasures and gratifications. But his conception of happiness must have been a great deal more like that of Aristotle than that at which Plato finally arrived: his virtue was at best a kind of policy, a relatively sublimated policy, but still a mode of insurance:—"No evil can happen to the good man alive or dead." It is fair, I think, to argue that such at least was Plato's understanding of his code, and that at first he was swayed by it as in the *Protagoras*, where he is identifying good with pleasure. But in the end and by the time of the *Republic*, very great evils and very many of them might happen to Plato's good man without affecting his happiness. He might be poor, infirm, and despised; in "disgrace with fortune and men's eyes;" in pain and misery; imprisoned and in danger of death; he might even fail to win the approval or consideration of the gods—and his felicity would remain intact with his virtue.

That Plato actually proves any such proposition, however cheerfully he undertakes the task, as that man is or can be happy absolutely and independently of circumstance, is not a fact. In the nature of the case such a demonstration is impossible. The sentiment must be taken as a forensic paradox such as Plato, like his compatriots, was so fond of. At the same time he, and I think Socrates also, would have preferred the rack to the throne of Archelaus.¹⁴ In any case Plato's conception of justice would deny the permanence or continuance of any such fate for the righteous; it would have contradicted his belief in the structural justice of reality and his doctrine of reminiscence and the persistence of the soul, to say nothing of subverting his theory of *ideas* and of the supreme good by which the connection of happiness and virtue seems to him to be guaranteed. So difficult is it to divest oneself of all the prepossessions of one's faith that Plato, I fancy, was incapable of arguing the question in its stark nakedness at all. But at all events the assertion has this much truth: not only does it evoke the memory of the Christian martyrs, but it points unmistakably to Socrates himself, whose practice so far kept pace with his

¹³ Precisely as his good was not without a strong tincture of utilitarianism. "Ἀλλὰ μὴν, ἔφη, εἴγ' ἐρωτᾷς με εἰ τι ἀγαθὸν οἶδα, ὃ μηδενὸς ἀγαθὸν ἔστιν, οὐτ' οἶδα, ἔφη, οὔτε δέομαι."—Xen., *Mem.*, III, viii, 3.

¹⁴ See *Gorgias*, 470d.

precept that it was upon his example, as we can hardly doubt, that Plato drew for his own philosophy of the happy man.

Already there is a little something elusive—or as the worldly might think illusory—about such a conception of virtue and happiness.¹⁵ It reduced happiness to a spiritual state. And to Plato the horror of wickedness or evil was precisely in this effect—the condition to which it inevitably by a kind of moral fatality reduced the soul; he likens it again and again to disease, as he compares righteousness with health.¹⁶ To the grosser mind of his contemporaries such a notion of virtue as consistent with a happiness totally insubstantial was wildly fantastic. None the less it was to Plato the fundamental and final reality; and it is in the attempt to make a place for such a transcendent causality—to show that virtue and happiness are states of the soul, the former as its health, the latter as its well-being—that he found himself led to the discovery of the ideas.

To appreciate the novelty it is necessary to remember how strange to the Greeks was the conception of an incorporeal reality. Even to Plato the higher soul was material still—wonderfully fine and tenuous and subtle—a simple, unitary, indissoluble substance, but by no means immaterial.¹⁷ It is the difficulty which Plato has to meet over and over in arguing his philosophy—the inability of his auditors to grasp the reality of the idea as such independent of its particular embodiments and concrete manifestations.¹⁸ As far as they were concerned, ideas might just as well be things; very probably the ordinary Greek would have thought of justice as a kind of thing, if he had thought of it as a reality at all. So far then from Plato's introducing a "reification" of abstractions in the usual sense, he actually spiritualized the commonplace acceptance of reality by detaching the *ideas* from their reflections and images at the same time that he insisted upon their *being*, as attested in particular by the conjunction of happiness and virtue, which he accepted finally as an ultimate datum of consciousness. On this point, where the matter hinges for the modern, since the immateriality of the ideas is not likely to disconcert him—on this point there is no chance for mistake, as the demonstration of the *Republic* is undertaken to show; in the absence of other conditions virtue alone is capable of producing such an affection of the spirit, so that in the rendering of Plato's thought it is hardly too

¹⁵ Grote, for example, seems to have difficulty even in understanding it. See his chapter on the *Gorgias* again.

¹⁶ Cf. *Gorgias*, 477-478 and *Laws*, 731c-d.

¹⁷ Compare St. Paul's σῶμα ψυχικόν and σῶμα πνευματικόν, I Corinthians, XV, 44-45.

¹⁸ See his retort to Meno, "Stop making many out of the one," etc.; *Meno*, 77a. Cf. 72d; and on the other hand the compliment to Theætetus for his ready comprehension of this sort of conception, *Theætetus*, 147.

strong a figure to say that virtue is happiness. What is doubtful is its status with reference to the sensible world. What kind of reality is it? And what is its mode of influence?

That Plato ever answered these questions, even to his own satisfaction, it would be idle to maintain. They have no answer. But they did lead him directly to the recognition of a moral nature. If virtue is productive of happiness, if there exists such an intimacy of relation that the two are found to be inseparable like health and nourishment, can we go further in the one case than in the other? As well ask why is gravitation. Such is the fundamental order of the world; such is its diathesis. For after all it is a world of human beings as well as of things, and in so far it is moral; such is the nature of it. And in this sort it is presided over by a higher and greater idea even than justice or righteousness—the *idea* of good.¹⁹

And here it seems but prudent to interpose a word of caution with regard to the use of the term *idea*. In current parlance our idea of good is the notion that we entertain of it, or pretty nearly what we think about it. In Platonic language, however, the idea of good is the good itself, as we speak of the quality of mercy or the science of chemistry. In this signification the existence of the idea and the good are conjoined—though the kind and manner of its existence may of course remain doubtful. Whereas in our common nomenclature the existence of the idea does not imply the existence of its object, or that of which it is the idea, but merely of the idea alone; or if we identify the two, the existence of the good becomes notional as in the Cartesian argument for the existence of God, which reduces, in our minds, the existence of God to the existence of the idea of God, and, if anything, rather discredits it in that it is an idea. The matter is elementary, but, as the successive philosophical transformations of the word itself show, it is all the same an insensible cause of a never-ending confusion, and is responsible for any amount of nominalistic and conceptualistic misunderstanding and misrepresentation. On this account the employment of *idea* for εἶδος or ἰδέα has been unfortunate—as well as for the reason that it fails any longer to render that suggestion of form or figure which still clings to the Greek as a synonym of μορφή and which is at least illustrative of Plato's notion of the *ideas* as giving shape, if only exemplarily or informatively, to the sensible and visible world. To be sure, the Greek word was as confusing as our own, though after a different fashion; but in view of our particular quandary it cannot be insisted too often that Plato does not differentiate the idea from what we should call its content or subject. Nor does he mean to attribute to that content or subject the sort

¹⁹ *Republic*, 509.

of merely abstract existence, the ghostlike reality or subsistence with which we have come to fob off our ideas and "essences;" in his mind the two are one and are both real objectively.

As far, then, as there is required an intermediary and connecting term between virtue and happiness it is supplied by the *idea of good*. Beyond this reach, however, Plato does not go. The good is what gives the world a decisively moral and hence intelligible disposition, what informs it with significance and relevance—as far as the world has sense and reality, it is the idea of good which confers that character upon it. I have spoken hitherto, perhaps, as though Plato thought the universe to be moral through and through. But there is another side to it. In addition to the presence of good his philosophy admits a second presence, the presence of evil—or to mince matters no more than he does, a principle of indiscrimination and illusion. "It is impossible to be rid of evils," he says, "for there needs must ever be something opposed to the good."²⁰ And for him this other is ἀνάγκη or necessity, the senseless obstinacy of change and mutability, that inveterate perversity which makes what we have come since Aristotle to call ὕλη, or matter so intractable, obdurate, and unmanageable—yes, and incomprehensible. Viewed in this way it is identifiable with physical causation, "the realm of law;" for what is such causation but the unreasonable persistency of things in their own shifty and alien ways? In short, it is indistinguishable from matter considered in its principle rather than its material—for Plato had conceived no substratum for that change which constitutes the subject of necessity. Or to be free of modern connotations which have reversed him so bewilderingly, it is mere becoming, the flux itself, flowing forever in swift vertiginous eddies and counterfeiting in its fleeting swirls the ideas of reality which transcend it while incapable of retaining more than a momentary resemblance to their inalterable perfections.

Such is, according to Plato, the nature of the phenomenal or sensible world, that world for which we now reserve the name *nature* exclusively. In some way or other, which he never succeeded in explaining, this world of particular things arises by reflection, as it might be, from the supervention of the ideas upon an originally indeterminate or undifferentiated medium, which is to Plato hardly more than a place or locus (τόπος or χώρα) as it were the visionary depth of a mirror or other featureless receptacle (ὑποδοχή).²¹ At all events, whatever it actually was or is to which Aristotle later gave the name of *hyle* or matter, it is still to Plato little better than a simulacrum without permanence or solidity, without form or consistence, a mere insubstantial screen or impalpable

²⁰ *Theaetetus*, 176a.

²¹ *Timaeus*, 49 ff.

background of smoke or shadow, unintelligible in itself, assuming or rather receiving shapes and appearances mimetically after the pattern of the ideas alone which impend upon it.²²

But whatever the mystery of its origin or its natural state, the universe, or rather the aggregate, divides into these two distinct parts or regions—the moral and intelligible and the sensible and conjectural. On the one hand Plato was too much of a Parmenidean to credit the reality of the flux in its endless perturbations; on the other, too much of a Heraclitean to deny its sensuality—if I may coin a word to cover an implication in which our vocabulary seems wanting—namely, the impudence with which the phenomenal forces itself upon our attention as though significant and veritable in its own right. Even to Protagoras he is willing to concede, as far as this latter world is concerned, a modicum of truth to the dogma, “man is the measure of all things.”²³ What he will not grant is the adequacy of this relative as a ground of certainty and a subject of knowledge. Such is the function of the ideas—to serve as the form of knowledge and of being or reality. With regard to their independence and transcendence he never wavers; they are distinct from the world of concretions (χωριστά) and beyond it (ἐπέκεινα). What perplexes him is their manner of intercourse or communication with this world, which he denotes by such vague terms as immanence (παρουσία) on the side of the ideas themselves, and participation and imitation (μίμησις) on the side of the sensibles (μεθεξίς), and association (κοινωνία) of either indifferently, though rather curiously, while he uses a wealth of illustration drawn from images, he seems never to have thought of the flux realistically as a kind of unclear mirror or obscure reflection of reality.

Such then is the genesis of the ideas. The core of the Platonic philosophy is stated in so many words by Adeimantus in the *Republic* and is accepted by Plato as the thesis for demonstration. The happiness of the just or righteous—this is the central tenet of Platonism; and it involves the entire doctrine of the ideas, for it presumes a belief in the objective reality of virtue as something beside a purely human ideal or a social convention, and along with it a belief in a congenial moral and intelligible order. It was a conviction which Plato had reached with the assistance, perhaps, of his conviction of happiness as the health of the spirit, subject in the nature of the case to conditions analogous to those of the bodily or physical soundness. Either there is this efficacy in goodness alone; or else what passes for justice must be reducible to other terms—expedi-

²² I need hardly call attention to the fact that under the ministration of our recent scientific and mathematical metaphysicians philosophy seems to be receding, with the dissolution of matter, into a pre-Aristotelian, though I doubt into a Platonic stage.

²³ *Theaetetus*, 166-167.

ency, utility, convention—in which alternative the universe itself ceases to be moral or intelligible in the proper sense and turns out to be merely “natural” in the sense of the Sophists, or as we should say physical (though as a matter of fact our own use of the word *natural* is hardly distinguishable from that of the Sophists themselves) and hence subject exclusively to blind and inscrutable necessity.

His problem, therefore, is the problem of human happiness—the only study worthy of the philosopher—the end and aim of living, the *summum bonum*. The morality of Socrates is his starting point, which in some way or other effected a conjunction of virtue and well-being. His first concern is, after the manner of his master, for a definition—not so much of virtue (he has not come so far as yet) as of the individual virtues. And he is inclined to follow his leader in the conjecture—was it much more to begin with?—that they all have a common ground in knowledge. To a certain extent his first attempts are miscarriages. The *Euthyphro*, the *Charmides*, the *Laches* throw him back upon his first position and its defence—particularly against the Sophists, whose pretensions to the secrets of knowledge, virtue, and happiness he undertakes to confute. It is a controversy which results in the deepening and purifying of his own conceptions: happiness is detached from pleasure and success and refined of all worldly admixture and dross. Knowledge is liberated from common opinion or conjecture (δόξα); righteousness or justice is separated from calculation or policy and associated as a higher reality with the supreme good. Unfortunately, in the case of such a subject, anything in the nature of demonstration in the ordinary sense is out of the question. It is a kind of ideal construction upon which he is forced to rely, in lieu of proof, for the justification of the conclusions at which he has arrived and consistently with which he erects his spiritual polity, his inner city or city of the soul. His plea reduces finally to something like an appeal to the idyllic imagination of his auditors.

II

It is impossible, however, to proceed without clearing away what are bound to appear from this point of view certain misapprehensions and misrepresentations of Plato's conception. Nor is such a labor merely negative. Any serious discussion of Platonism, however mistaken its conclusions, ought to be instructive in some wise. Even this history of error is of service in turning up the soil and loosening a few of those obstinate aftergrowths which in gradually fastening themselves upon our minds finally come to seem an integral part of philosophy itself. We have travelled a great way, much of it circuitous, since Plato's time, and

have undergone a great many dubious experiences, until it is one of the most difficult undertakings in the world to recover the directness and simplicity of consciousness which was undoubtedly characteristic of his thought.

Now, of all such distortions or perversions the most humiliating is that which would make him and his associates the dupes of language and would see in them the hapless victims of a tricky vocabulary. It is in this manner that the ambiguity of such expressions as *to do well* (τὸ εὖ πράττειν) is supposed to account for the Socratic identification of virtue and happiness.

But while such a supposition is too absurd to deserve serious attention, particularly when it is recalled how perspicaciously Plato sees through the duplicity of not-being (τὸ μὴ ὄν), it is not so easy to dismiss the critics of a more philosophical stripe who incline to reduce his philosophy, wherever possible, to terms of grammatical and logical predication.²⁴ Inasmuch as language is representative, after a fashion, of thought, there is nothing unreasonable in supposing that some of the problems of mind should have become implicated in its structure and should in turn be recoverable from it. In this way metaphysics may come to appear, as sometimes it is, a pure logomachy or pother about words; but on the other hand, language may not be incapable on occasions of giving philosophy itself a lesson. Hence it will perhaps be worth the time and pains to see what sort of vista such a grammatical or syntactical view of the *ideas* is capable of opening.

That all language embodies a sort of general or popular psychology nobody will dream of disputing. Everyone who undertakes to express himself through such a medium, tacitly adopts for the purpose a whole set of ready-made hypotheses or assumptions regarding sensation, perception, cognition, and the like. But ancient and even elementary as some of them may be, the character of these beliefs and conjectures becomes evident only on reflection at an advanced stage in the development of the tongue and of those who use it. In this manner we may if we please imagine Plato—or if we have scruples against compromising Plato himself, we may imagine someone else in his place, some Aristocles or other—without formal grammar or codification of usage, beginning to concern himself for the signification of his phraseology.

With regard to that class of words which we know as nouns and which was one of the very few divisions of speech for which Plato may have had a distinctive designation,²⁵ though there is some question of the exactitude of his knowledge even in this case, the general sense was

²⁴ Gomperz, I think, is a fair example.

²⁵ See *Sophist*, 263d.

superficially clear. Such words appeared names attached to persons and objects or associated with them, as *Aristides* or *horse*. For I take it that when the Greek, including Plato himself, said, "That is Aristides" or "That is a horse," he believed that he was referring to an actual man or beast, the conception of mental figments as the subject of reference being a late, even a modern, subtlety, although it was forecast by Protagoras. Nor was he doubtful, either, of the purport of his answer when he replied appropriately to a certain type of question, "Aristides is just."

At this point, however, he might begin to lose confidence. To be sure, the interpretation of *Aristides* offers little or no difficulty, or that of *is*—so far. Subject and verb seem perfectly simple and transparent at first sight—though later they were to make trouble enough and to spare. But how about *just*? Suppose our Aristocles under examination, as by the old inquisitor himself, with respect to the predicate: "What is just?" In order to frame a reply, aside from the difficulties of definition which are out of our way at present, he has now to turn his predicate into a subject. His method of doing so, whatever ingenuity it might have cost in the first place, had come to be easy enough in the end. He would prefix the definite article to the neuter singular of the adjective, as we speak of "the beautiful" or "the just," and he was prepared to make statements about his predicate too: "The just is so and so."

But how long would it be possible for him to dodge a Socratic cross-examination concerning the status of this τὸ δίκαιον or the just? Other subjects appear to be names—ostensibly of persons and things; what is this τὸ δίκαιον the name of?²⁶ As long as the form of the adjective was retained—as it was for a great while in some instances—this sort of interrogation was not likely to importune the curiosity of the average Greek citizen unduly, quick-witted as he might be—at least Hippias in the *Hippias Major* has difficulty in appreciating the force of it as regards τὸ καλόν or the beautiful; and his perplexity is not without parallels in Plato.²⁷ But in those cases where the neuter adjective had been already supplanted by a noun or paired with one,²⁸ even the most heedless could hardly remain insensible of the point when pressed. What then is the significance of such a subject as *justice*, and what does it name, if anything?

Now, it is conceivable that in calling such subjects (or rather their reference) as *the just*, τὸ δίκαιον, and *the beautiful*, τὸ καλόν, ideas, our

²⁶ With the logical legitimacy of any such performance as I am sketching, I have, of course, nothing to do just now. The question at present is one of Plato's actual procedure—did he or Socrates arrive at his ideas by turning predicates into subjects (not, is it justifiable to do so)? or at all events, how far is such a supposition likely to illuminate or add to the understanding of his doctrine?

²⁷ Cp. *Meno*, 72d.

²⁸ As happened to τὸ σῶφρον, the temperate, and σωφροσύνη, temperance.

Aristocles—for I still hesitate to commit the Plato of the dialogues—it is conceivable, I suppose, that he, in place of Plato, might have meant nothing more, to begin with, than to provide a convenient handle for this new or newly acquired variety of subject. Nor is it wholly impossible that in insisting upon their reality and independence he would simply be affirming their genuineness and distinction as subjects in comparison with other subjects. “To be sure,” he might reply to his Socratic questioner, “they differ from other subjects like *Aristides* and *horse*; but at the same time in the sense of subject they are equally real and viable.” And it may be too that in originating expressions like αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό he would have been emphasizing, at first, this contrast as between subject and predicate, noun and adjective; though by the time he had reached this point—if he ever had—he should have been on the verge of a much more considerable discovery.

I have no desire to be otiose; but since I have spent so much breath on this topic already, I may as well run the risk of carrying it a little farther. Let us suppose, then, that our Socratic quiz, impatient of the predicate adjective for the time being, has shifted his questioning to the verb: “You call δίκαιον or the *just* an idea, do you? Well, pray what do you make of the *is* when you declare that Aristides is just? What is this *is* the name of?” There is but one way out; if such a question is to be answered at all, it is necessary to recognize the *is*, after some fashion or other, as an expression of being and to represent it by some form of words capable of serving as a subject in its turn—τὸ εἶναι or something of the sort. On reflection, however, such a conception is seen to branch in two direction—into existence (τὸ ὄν) on the one hand, and into essence (οὐσία) on the other.²⁹ And from these premises this Aristocles of ours, who by this time is by way of being a metaphysician as well as a logician and grammarian, may be trusted to argue that in the assertion, “Aristides is just,” he is affirming of Aristides not merely existence and substance but essence also or that whereby he is and has his being; that is, since he is just, he is, and is so by virtue of justice.³⁰ Whence it follows that the ideas, which began as predicate adjectives, turn out to be essences, from which the sensible world derives its significance by participation.

Thanks to the nature of language, which lends itself so obligingly to a confusion of words and meaning, it is but a step at most from a belief in the relative reality of ideas as subjects to a belief in their absolute

²⁹ I omit the notion of identity as inconvenient, since my remarks are only illustrative anyway. As the reader has noticed already, I am making no effort to be exact, much less exhaustive. Besides, identity is another matter altogether.

³⁰ Cp. *Hippias Major*, 289d: αὐτὸ τὸ δίκαιον ᾧ τὰλλα δίκαια πάντα φαίνεται δίκαια εἶναι.

reality as substances. There is no difficulty about such a transition—least of all for the supposititious author of the foregoing reflections, particularly if we assume, as we must by hypothesis, that he shares the Platonic view of reality as identical with the intelligible—a specification to which the ideas answer perfectly. While further, since reality is one with the ideas themselves, its nature must be open to the same instrument of research and investigation—namely, definition, which thus becomes the sole means for the apprehension of being.

To this conclusion I imagine my logico-grammarian to have come as it were in the first burst and enthusiasm of discovery. But with the outlines of his system spread out before him, it is impossible that he should not awaken little by little to its difficulties and embarrassments. A genuine reality has certain claims which it is not always easy to satisfy speculatively. Such a reality is not wholly unwarranted, for example, in asserting a right to some sort of individual consistence and even local habitation. And while it may be possible to endow these logical notions with transcendence and relegate them to a region of their own, like “the intelligible place,” the procedure fails to stifle objection completely. Nor is it altogether clear in what manner such an idea may be shared by a number of participants and still retain its integrity; not to speak of the complementary hardship involved in a single individual’s owing his character, like Aristides, to a number of different essences at once, for Aristides is not only just but unpopular, at all events temporarily.

Into these apories, however, I must decline to be led by this particular route. Since this manner of discussion seems to me impertinent to an understanding of the authentic Platonism, it is unprofitable to give it more than passing notice or to allow it to arrest our attention.³¹ But with regard to two difficulties I must make an exception—namely the inclusion in the system of such substantives as those of identity and difference, and the extension of the doctrine to include generalities or classes like man and horse.

Everyone who has read the *Sophist* in immediate connection with the *Republic* must have been struck with a sense of confusion, if not of dismay, at finding such logical or ontological categories as being, rest and motion, identity and difference supplanting or at least ranking the moral and intelligible realities of the earlier dialogues, justice and the rest of the virtues (ἡ ἄλλη ἀρετή), above all the good, in contravention of Plato’s express statement in the *Republic* of the superiority of the good

³¹ Gomperz has viewed the landscape pretty thoroughly o’er from this point of view. See for instance what he makes of the hobgoblins of predication and inherence in his *Greek Thinkers*, Eng. Trans., Vol. II, Chap. VIII.

over being. To be sure Plato at first appears to distinguish these interlopers by a designation of their own; he begins by calling them γένη or genera. But he ends by including them among the ideas proper.³² And yet that the two are mutually incompatible is clear on inspection. If good, for instance, is an *idea* it must exist in itself, by virtue of its own being, and not by participation in another. In other words being is a relative, not an absolute, and exists according to all his previous teaching in function of the good.³³ It is, in Plato's own expression, only as it were the name of a name.³⁴ While the confusion is worse confounded by the circumstance that in the course of the dialogue these genera, as I shall call them for the sake of distinction, are shown to shift their natures from time to time in a manner inconsistent with the stability ascribed to *ideas* essentially, so that not-being turns out to be other or different and hence comes of itself to partake of existence together with the same or identity, and being in like fashion may be either at rest or in motion, to say nothing of other transubstantiations equally or even more anomalous.³⁵

Now, however Plato succeeded in reconciling to himself these discrepancies between the genera and the original ideas, if he ever did—for his attack upon "the friends of the ideas" in this same dialogue, if taken in its plain and obvious intention, is not particularly reassuring³⁶—still, it is clear enough that he had smuggled in these aliens, so much must be conceded, by the way of predication. There is always a strong temptation—perhaps it is the besetting sin of intellectualism—to confound discourse with fact, to mistake the structure of language for the structure of reality. Such, as Santayana seems to think, is the error of metaphysics, to substitute grammar for physics, as Pythagoras substituted arithmetic for it—or at least to erect the parts of speech into ontological substances.³⁷ And this inclination was tremendously strengthened by the Sophists, whose existence depended upon their ability to pass off words for things. How far Plato may have succumbed in the end to their example, is an open question; but it is distressing to find that in the very dialogue which he undertook for the purpose of demolishing Sophistry in its principle he

³² See 247a and 255e. For example, διὰ τὸ μετέχειν τῆς ιδέας τῆς θατέρου; such is the manner in which he comes to speak of them. And cf. the discussion of τὸ καλόν, 257d, e.

³³ *Republic*, 509b.

³⁴ 244d. "The idea of existence, then, is the very same with the idea of what we conceive to be existent."—Hume: *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part II, Section VI.

³⁵ For a summary discussion of these perplexities see Bonitz: *Platonische Studien*, 190-195.

³⁶ 248a, etc.

³⁷ See for an amusing illustration *Life and Finite Individuality*, edited by H. Wildon Carr, Symposium II, wherein the reader is invited to consider whether the soul is a subject or an adjective.

himself should have become entangled in the Sophistic fallacy—and that in spite of the fact that in the *Republic*, as though in prevision of the danger, he invalidated such speculations by his discrimination of the two minds and their functions (νόησις and διάνοια), the latter the organ of judgment or predication, the former that of divination or insight. Hence if Platonism is fundamentally a search for reality, it cannot be referred, on Plato's own showing, to the formal subjects of grammar and logic. Platonism proper is not in predication and cannot be got out of it. In a word, Plato at the moment when he is most himself protests that reality --a *fortiori* the all or aggregate with its mixture of the intelligible and the unintelligible—is not a logic, to say nothing of a grammar.

The fact is that Plato at the close of his career had saddled his philosophy with three passengers, none of which rode very comfortably with the others—the ideas proper (εἶδη), the genera or categories (γέννη), which though themselves relatives he insists upon treating as absolutes, and the common or class notions. These several conceptions, which were gradually forced upon him by the pressure of his own thought, he never attempts explicitly to reconcile (for the *Parmenides* can hardly be considered in such a light); but after his habit simply neglects or ignores the others when engaged with any one in particular. With the general or class notions he had indeed little to do at any time; they appear to interest him only incidentally as in the *Parmenides*. But of the genera (γέννη) he makes a good deal in those of his later or Eleatic dialogues that have won the regard of the commentators by their air of profundity as well as by the problems which they offer for the exercise of the critics' ingenuity. And it is the labor of such exegetes in bringing together by hook or crook what Plato himself has discreetly kept asunder which has caused not a little of the confusion befogging this portion of his teaching.

In view of these considerations it seems unwarranted to assign to the doctrine of ideas, whatever excrescences it may have grown, a purely formal or methodological origin. Not only does such a supposition falsify its character; it also violates its obvious chronology. The substitution of categorical relatives for the ideas marks a decline—or at least a later and elderly age of Platonism. It was only when embarrassed with the empirical difficulties of his philosophy—in itself a kind of *défaillance* or defection—that Plato had recourse to the expedient of bolstering up his doctrine by a kind of rationalistic mechanism, or rather, perhaps, of distracting attention from its difficulties by a sort of confusion or *ignoratio elenchi* such as he not infrequently practiced on other occasions.

On the other hand, if it is a mistake, for all these perplexities, to confound the *ideas* in their purity with predicates or predicaments, it is

hardly better than a blunder to identify them with concepts or abstractions or universals. If such were not the case, there would be no problem in the questions propounded by Parmenides touching the *ideas* of man and fire and water and even of hair and ordure.³⁸ If the *ideas* were nothing more than generic or class notions the apory which had at this time begun momentarily to unsettle Plato's mind would never have troubled him. But no matter what his later embarrassments and how he undertook to be rid of them, it is he himself who discriminates, in so many words, against conceptual notions; and behind his own words it should be unnecessary to go.

The text for the statement is the well-known passage in the sixth book of the *Republic*,³⁹ the work which is authoritative for the maturity of Plato's thought. It is the passage in which he divides the all into two worlds or realms—the sensible or visible, and the intelligible or noetic. The former, which is the realm of opinion or common knowledge, corresponding to the field of modern science, he subdivides into two portions. The lower or the region of similitude consists of images, which he defines both as shadows and as reflections in waters and solid surfaces, in such things as have a close and polished consistency.⁴⁰ The upper portion or the region of belief or conjecture comprises the actual objects themselves, whose images constitute the plane preceding. Such is the inferior or phenomenal realm, the world of becoming that never is. The superior or intelligible realm is likewise divided into two sections. But in this case it is not so easy to understand or explain the principle of division. What it amounts to, however, is something of this sort. The higher region of the intelligible realm includes the ideas proper. As to the lower subdivision, the actual things or objects themselves in the upper level of the phenomenal world on the plane just below become a kind of images, in their turn, or reflections of a yet higher sort of something which Plato illustrates by the mathematical conceptions of the square, the diameter, and the like. Those conceptions are drawn from visible objects and things but are not identical with them. Nor are the figures that the mathematician actually describes the subjects of his reasonings; he is reasoning rather about what these figures represent or symbolize—the square or the triangle in itself, of which no sensible figure is more than an image or reflection, though taken in itself such a figure is a denizen of the phenomenal world and in this sense is capable of casting its own shadow within that world like its fellow members.

³⁸ *Parmenides*, 130b. Cf. Julius Stenzel: *Studien zur Entwicklung der platonischen Dialektik von Sokrates zu Aristoteles*, s. 27, et seq.

³⁹ *Republic*, 509c, et seq.

⁴⁰ ἐν τοῖς ὅσα πικνά τε καὶ φανὰ συνέστηκεν.—*Republic*, 510a.

Now, when it is remembered that at the time mathematical conceptions were the only abstractions or general notions or universals in good standing, the significance of the preceding classification will become clear. By this lower division of intelligibles (τὰ μαθηματικά) Plato seems to mean what we have come in a comprehensive sense to call concepts or abstracts—and while including them in the section of intelligibles he intends to distinguish them from the *ideas*, which he places above them in the higher division, the superior range of all. And as though to provide against misunderstanding he assigns to each its own faculty; to the conceptions or concepts, intellection (διάνοια); to the ideas, reason (νοῦς), whose exercise he characterizes by the term insight or vision (ὄψις, θέα) and whose activity alone is capable of yielding a knowledge of reality or wisdom.

About the general sense of Plato's distinctions there is little doubt. That the lower intelligibles should be designated mathematic (τὰ μαθηματικά) is an accident of nomenclature due to the state of learning at the period. The explanation puts it beyond question that they are things (that is, visibles, τὰ ὁρατά) reduced to the nature of abstractions—as by geometry, since geometry was the only authoritative science in existence, and had in fact arrogated to itself the *mathematic* or science, as distinguished from ἐπιστήμη, exclusively. For these reasons it would seem as though the mathematics (τὰ μαθηματικά) were more understandingly translated in this connection by *scientific* than by *mathematical* in our acceptance—*scientific concepts* being the nearest approximation.

As for what further conclusions may be drawn from Plato's arrangements, that is a matter of discretion. Is it permissible, for instance, to infer that the same relation existed in his mind between the upper and lower intelligibles as that actually specified between the two visibles or sensibles? That is to say, are the concepts (τὰ μαθηματικά) to be taken as a kind of images in their own province of the *ideas*—discursive or rational duplicates (duplicates of reflection, if I may use the words without levity) of the divine ideas?⁴¹ Unquestionably Plato saw a possibility of ascending to the *ideas* by this route, though it may have been merely disciplinary, a kind of training of the philosopher's sinews that he was thinking of and not a progressive acquisition or extension of knowledge.

Be that as it may; one of the most striking features of the passage, aside from its purely doctrinal aspect, is this illustrative use of images. That Plato found them a source of wonder and admiration is not surprising; it is rather surprising that no one else should have been affected so strongly by them. In themselves they are still puzzling enough in all conscience. But before mirrors were a matter of course, when reflec-

⁴¹ Corresponding to the distinction that he seems to have drawn later between mathematical figures and mathematical ideas [or between mathematical numbers and ideal numbers].

tions were more or less accidental and imperfect—usually surprised in streams and pools under conditions of constant disturbance, or glimpsed in vague surfaces; how mysterious and baffling they must have appeared! Where is the image that glimmers for an instant and vanishes? Which seems but is not? Which is visible to the eye but impalpable to the touch? Which is so specious and so furtive? What is it but an evidence of the phenomenal—the *other* itself? Like becoming, it is unreal and illusory, here an instant and gone the next, a fertile subject of uncertainty and conjecture, quite sufficient to inspire and explain Parmenides' book of opinion on τὸ μὴ ὄν. It is so apt a symbol that one is half inclined to take Plato to task for not representing the phenomenal flux in such terms as a shifting reflection of the *ideas*. To anyone who has watched the ruffled effigies of trees and clouds and sky in running water and has turned his eyes upon their untroubled originals in the air above, the figure seems almost inevitable. And yet it is only a figure after all; and these apparent realities that look so secure and self-sufficient are but apparitions and manifestations of sense themselves. And Plato was not likely in so serious a matter to content himself with a superficial metaphor for the inherence or immanence of the *ideas*.

The fact that the general disposition of Plato's universe is so different from ours in so many respects, does no more, perhaps, than raise a presumption against its identity in any one other respect. But it ought to count for something. Where the topography is so diverse, it is hardly fair to assume that a certain configuration is a counterpart of that which we are used to. At all events it is worthy of notice, in face of the modern inclination to decorate Plato with an honorary degree in science, that the province which we have taken for the subject of certainty is just the opposite for him—a limbo of opinion and surmise composed of counterfeits and their inconstant correlates; and that the latter, in particular the modern type of solidity and assurance, is to him the subject of belief (πίστις), to be taken on trust, as a matter of guesswork. Under the circumstances it is likely, aside from his direct deposition to the contrary, that the *ideas*, the highest and unique reality and subject of knowledge, should be nothing but our subjective abstractions from this conjectural patchwork of the senses?

Nor does it help matters to refer to hypostasis—to use a word beloved of the whole Platonic faculty.⁴² In this view the *ideas* become creations of the mind, and projections from it, having an existence indistinguishable from that of Shakespeare's Hamlet and relying for their being upon the imagination. So considered, they challenge comparison with the *idéés*

⁴² This, on the whole, is Zeller's system.

forces of Fouillée, whose philosophy owes not a little to his early study of Plato, and with the illusions of art and literature. The difficulties of such an account, when taken literally, are two-fold. It restricts the actuality of the *ideas* to a sort of hypnotic influence or obsession; and at the same time it retains their conceptual origin and nature. And neither of these positions is good Platonism. That Plato may have been wrong is quite conceivable; conceivable too that we may not be able to make anything of the *ideas* save so many glorified quasi-personifications. But that is not the point. The point is whether Plato meant by his *ideas* what we mean by concepts, or more broadly, conceptions. And to that question the answer—Plato has given it himself—is No.

What hinders us in understanding Plato's thought (and this is our main reason for offering so many substitutes for the *ideas*—that we do not understand them, though we should probably reject them just the same even if we did), what stands between us and Platonism nowadays is the fact that we have no appreciation, no conception of an effective moral order. We do not believe in moral consequences. Ethics we regard with Protagoras as a convention or expedient. Morality, so far as it is a reality for us at all, is the work of society, as it were a kind of etiquette and not very much more serious. In our eyes society makes morality; not morality society. And we have an idea that by ignoring or making light of crime—like murder—we shall somehow or other render it of no great account, as though we were passing off a *gaucherie*, a kind of social solecism. In the same manner we have convinced ourselves that we can commit injustice with impunity; there are so many ways of doing wrong and escaping the consequences—if not alone, by the connivance of others—it is but a matter of stipulation or agreement, a bargain anyway.⁴³ We are blind to the fact that the issue is always out of our hands. Peace is the health of nations as happiness is the health of the individual soul, and its essence is justice. The nation or the polity or the society or the individual that deviates or diverges from the *idea* of justice is diseased and vitiated; all alike they have forfeited their being; their reality has departed from them with their virtue—they have become merged with the flux and are playthings of necessity and chance, of corruption and decay, accident and mishap.

Such is the law of the *ideas*. And in such a sense I am quite willing to speak of the ideas loosely in the same breath with law—though I should prefer *principle* if I must use one or the other. At any rate, so far as

⁴³ We make a dozen Alsace-Lorraines in Europe where there was one before, and we expect to maintain a permanent peace arbitrarily on such a basis by conspiring together to that intent against our victims.

they are comparable at all, it is with moral law or principle that they are so; and as inherent in the nature of reality above man and his invention, they are religious or, as Plato would say, divine obligations, and have nothing in common with our mechanics or with our scientific methodology. They are regulative of man, not of matter. For law in our sense Plato had indeed no very high regard. At best it is but an affair of necessity, the stupid inveteracy of that mysterious something—call it matter or energy or *élan vital*—which we shall never know save in as far as it resists our efforts, and like a blank illimitable void blocks our vision and defies our penetration. For him necessity, then, is characteristic of the flux and is one with accident or chance, strange as the conjunction may seem to our minds. They are both immeasurable, incomprehensible, and amoral and inhuman. The statue falls upon the head of the bystander, or the traveller is killed at the crossroads.⁴⁴ That is necessity, the senseless obstinacy of that refractory something indeterminate or *ἄπειρον* which lies behind the phenomenal—or rather, which is the very phenomenal itself. But this is accident or casualty as well. If it were an intelligent principle, it would recognize and provide for the emergency. If it were intelligible, it might be foreseen and avoided. The two are but diverse faces of the same event. We prate of prediction and prevision as though science had the future under its thumb, and yet we suffer thirty-five thousand-odd deaths a year by “unavoidable accidents,” powerlessly one might say, with idiotic complacence when one considers the disparity between our professions and the facts, until civilization so called has become more hazardous than was ever savagery itself. Such is the “reign of law,” as we understand it. But so monstrous was such an ethics to Sophocles and Aristotle that they could not rest until they had harmonized the death at the crossroads and the fall of the statue with justice; necessity is no explanation.⁴⁵ As for Plato there may be a law of the *ideas* though he never stated it; but one thing is certain, it has nothing in common with our law. An invariable operation, like one event to the righteous and the wicked without discrimination or distinction, was bound to seem to him utterly senseless, and iniquitous too. To speak of law in connection with Heraclitus, now, is much less inappropriate; he was concerned with incessant variations, and had very possibly conceived of such variations as concomitant. But the Platonic *ideas*, in themselves and as they stand at the height of Platonism, are another matter. At loosest they may be described as determinations or determinants, exponents or indices by

⁴⁴ Make it but the tourist and the railway crossing, and you will have a modern instance.

⁴⁵ Reference to *Œdipus Tyrannus* is unnecessary. For the statue of Mitys see Aristotle's *Poetics*, IX, 12. Molière after Molina has made the tragedy suggested.

which matter is affected—but such language is purely figurative and cannot be taken literally.

I have not perhaps given this subject of the equivalence of *idea* and law the space or the attention which it may seem to demand in view of the vogue which such an interpretation of Plato's doctrine has momentarily acquired.⁴⁶ But frankly, the case of law and concept appears to my mind to be bound so tightly by the tie of generalization or induction that they must stand or fall together. And Plato is so obviously not attempting to generalize or *induce* his *ideas* from observation that it looks a little gratuitous, in spite of plausible analogies, to carry the argument any farther. His *procédé* is fundamentally deductive, the *procédé* of definition.

And the same sort of criticism is true, I believe, of the methodological explanation,⁴⁷ with the additional objection that such a view affiliates the *ideas* not only with generalization but with predication and judgment also. It is at bottom a conceptual interpretation. That the *ideas* are somehow or other principles of intelligibility, Plato himself declares. But they are so, simply because they are principles of reality—and let me add principles of moral reality at that—while they are, further, active principles and not merely epistemological. They involve in some way an obligation, even a duty, and they penalize its dereliction. That they are but methods or means or forms for unifying a perceptual manifold, as the phrase goes, a bare mechanism or mould or systematization of the mind—ingenious as the suggestion may be—such an exposition is at variance with their author's own account of them. It is possible that he was edging toward such a compromise with rationalism; there are passages which indicate that he had coquetted with the notion of intellectual schemata or even logical figures. But for that matter did Plato ever believe with Kant that knowledge is in any sense of our own creation? Such at least is not the Platonism of the *Republic*; and for that reason, if for no other, the notion may be dismissed from this particular consideration.

All these efforts to pass off some modern substitute or other for the *ideas* themselves are in principle mischievous enough. They are in their sort no better than subterfuges, undertaken in the not wholly unlaudable desire to modernize Plato in the hope of conciliating those who can not

⁴⁶ For an unusually perspicuous example of this sort of jugglery whereby Platonism is made over into a philosophy of change, see C. E. M. Joad's *Essays in Common Sense Philosophy*, pp. 143-146. My stricture, I may add, is meant to cover only this passage and those akin to it, for there is much sound Platonism in the essay as a whole, it seems to me, as well as in that entitled "The Objectivity of the Concept of Beauty," though it should be added that Plato's τὸ καλόν was a moral reality too.

⁴⁷ As sponsored, for instance, by Natorp, who looks upon Plato as a pre-Kantian, so impossible is it for a German to free his mind from Kant—though as a matter of fact it is rather the Sophists who were the pre-Kantians.

or will not understand him as he is. All alike they show an unwillingness both to reject or repudiate him outright and to accept him freely and frankly at his own estimate. They are compromises and accommodations, and do their subject more harm than good. But while those of which I have been speaking try at least to rationalize their original in reducing the *ideas* to terms of mind, in some sort or other; much less scrupulous and much more vicious is the inclination, so agreeable with contemporary laxity of thought and conduct, to debase them to the irresponsible level of sentiment and caprice by confounding them with ideals and the doctrine to which they belong with what we like to call idealism.

To define a state of mind as nebulous as that which passes popularly under the name of idealism is pretty difficult. If it consists with anything at all, it is with nothing more definite than the glorification of velleity and whim. Whatever we think desirable under the circumstances, whatever we believe would gratify our present mood, whatever seems to be after our own liking—such is the general sense of an ideal. Peace, as it happens, is, or appears to be, an ideal for the time being, and so does democracy—not, alas, justice. As an expression or term of discontent, of dissatisfaction with things as they are and of a hankering after something quite different, a sort of moral nostalgia, an escape from reality, our ideals are nine times out of ten based upon a false conception, if not a total negation, of experience, or an unwillingness to face it, and are a source of error and disaster. They represent, as a rule, nothing but an instinctive revolt from actuality. Whatever truth they possess is at best a pragmatic truth—in fact, ideals are the sole standards of the pragmatists. Being non-existent they are such stuff as dreams are made on, and the enthusiasm which they inspire depends on their illusoriness. Even when an ideal is realized, as we say, by some process of pragmatic self-deception, there is no surety that its possession of our minds may not be injurious and even ruinous—as is quite conceivable—yes, very probable, in the case of democracy. An ideal may be and usually is evidence to nothing but impotence or perversity or distaste.

On the contrary—is it otiose to say so again?—an idea in Plato's conception is not a fancy, not even an aspiration—not a contrivance of our own at all. As far as we know it, it is a discovery and we ourselves partake of it or participate in it. Inasmuch as we do so, we are members of a moral and intelligible order; inasmuch as we do not, we are creatures of physical or mechanical necessity, subjects of cause and effect, playthings of evolution or whatever name you choose to confer upon the remorseless successions of change and decay, of generation and corruption. It is not our ideals that will save us; they are but the effervescence of change,

breaking and reforming incessantly. Peace without justice, democracy without virtue, luxury without happiness—they have neither stability nor efficacy; they are but blown from the stream and fall back upon it.

“The earth hath bubbles as the water has,
And these are of them.”

To search out the ideas, to meditate them, to honor them, to pattern after them—this is the Platonic wisdom and morality and religion.

III

To recommend such a programme to the generality of mankind would be no light, if not an impossible task. With the aims and ambitions of common experience Platonism, has little or nothing to do. It is not a receipt for getting on or making a figure in the world, like the Nicomachean ethics. And to those engaged in such an affair it will seem impractical and preposterous as it always has done.⁴⁸ In fact Platonism was a failure after this kind in its own day. Few readings are sadder for the anxious optimist than the passage in the *Theatetus*, composed not impossibly after the second visit to Syracuse, in which Plato appears to accept the fact. It was Aristotle, the mentor of Alexander of Macedon, not Plato, the censor of Dionysius of Syracuse, who succeeded in gaining favor with the powers of this world. And yet with a little good will something may be done toward that sort of mutual tolerance which results from the assignment of its own rights and titles to each party of a dispute.

In their purity, then, the Platonic *ideas*, as I have been doing my best to show, are characterized by several notes in conjunction. In the first place, they are realities in their own right, independent of the mind which apprehends them, and of the matter, as we call it, through or in which they may be darkly and uncertainly discerned and to which they lend an illusion of reality in as far as becoming happens to fall for an instant into this form or that and take on the appearance of objects and things—

“like a water vexed with storms
Pale tempestuous reflections of a higher world of forms.”

To that extent they may be said to impart to generation a transient significance, though they can hardly be spoken of as efficient causes or even laws, since necessity remains the sovereign of the flux. In as far, however, as matter—to give a name to change considered substantively—is capable of conforming to the pattern of the *ideas*, it becomes related for the time

⁴⁸ *Crito*, 49d.

being to another nature, which, after Greek usage, we should have a right to call divine, as is the case with man (as well as "the heavenly bodies"), who has not merely an animal but a spiritual nature too.

With regard to the being man, I confess, I am not entirely at ease. Thus much, however, seems certain. In agreement with his dualistic convictions, Plato thinks of him as a combination of body and soul, partaking of generation and decay by the former constituent, and of real being by the latter. Of the soul he appears to conceive as a simple, subtle, indecomposable element, akin to the ideas but not an idea itself, in accordance probably with the ancient axiom that like alone can comprehend like.⁴⁹ As for man's activity, it must be confined effectively to the moral nature, for as far as he belongs materially to the flux he lies under the ban of necessity or determination, though with some capability, perhaps, of influencing the phenomenal as far as its refractoriness allows. But this at least is his office and function—"as he sees the beautiful through that which makes it visible, to breed not illusions but true examples of virtue;"⁵⁰ and as far as he fulfills this function he has his part in the incorruptibility of the ideas; as far as he fails to do so he fails to attain to the proper virtue of his kind.

In this aspect the ideas are after their several kinds not merely beatitudes but duties. Even about a table or a bedstead—if we take Plato's illustrations as anything more than analogies or images in language—there is something which a table or a bed ought to be if it is to be a table or a bed in good earnest, and falling short of which it is by so much the less a table or a bed and by so much the more an indeterminate and undifferentiated nonentity or *Unding*. So much is it the case that knowledge involves an obligation that Plato is unable to conceive the possibility of a man's doing wrong save from ignorance—since the good is obviously a good—and affirms that righteousness consists in such a knowledge without further qualification. And why not, if the ideas are such as have been indicated? The man who derogates from the virtue of humanity becomes a moral outlaw. No longer informed by his proper essence, he falls under the sway of necessity; he is the sport of irrational forces and circumstances—he ceases to be a human being, a little less than kind, and turns into a thing, a part of the huddling indiscriminacy of the flux.

It might be instructive to compare briefly this reading of the ideas, which represents approximately the spirit of Platonism at its peak, with

⁴⁹ Cf. *Phaedrus*, 230a, *Sophist*, 248a, *Phaedo*, 78c, and 79b. There is no real inconsistency, as I see it, between this view and that of the tripartite nature of the human spirit as developed in the *Republic*, the soul of the *Phaedo* being evidently limited to the foremost or uppermost member of the trio, the ἡγεμονικόν in Stoic phrase. See Note 40, "The Sophists," p. 96, *infra*.

⁵⁰ *Symposium*, 202a.

Æschylus' and Sophocles' treatment of their erring protagonists and the ruin which overtakes them. For such, if I am right in my understanding of Plato's doctrine, is the explication of their tragic philosophy. Whether they ever formulated it to themselves or even exhibited it with perfect clearness to their audiences, it was some such vision of human responsibility and defection which they had at the back of their minds and which they were intent upon illustrating in their drama. The incompatibility of error and well-being, the fatality of wrong-doing, the ethical consistency of character and its consequences—these are Platonic as well as Æschylean and Sophoclean motives. And about the fate of the offender there is something wild and irregular which is equally Platonic. It is not only pitiable as an instance of mortal frailty but it is horrible because it is irrational and inhuman. And it is so, as Plato makes clear, because the transgressor is literally, in our expressive metaphor, a lost soul, an abandoned creature—one who in lapsing from righteousness has passed beyond the pale and in overstepping the bounds of virtue has delivered himself into the confusions of accident and chance. He has lost his portion in the "divine" and in becoming a thing among things has made himself obnoxious to their law, to the necessity of change, in whose interminable vortices he is helplessly involved. Hence the bafflingness of Attic tragedy—the unfathomable obscurity of its catastrophes. It is the wrong-doer that perishes; justice has thrown him to the wolves of chaos and turned her back upon his dissolution.

But Plato has done more than annotate the tragedy of his great countrymen. He has seated the evil in the soul, not in the act. It is the spirit of the culprit that harbors the lie and without correction becomes a source of infection, a miasma. As in so many respects, his thought in this particular is not without its Christian analogues. For stranger as he may have been to the conviction of sin, he was no stranger to the sense of duty. Granted that no man does wrong willingly as no one willingly makes a mistake, yet for the ignorance by which he blunders he is alone accountable, whether by sloth or conceit of wisdom. His ignorance is his fault; and that he does not err with intent to err—as who does?—is no excuse for the defect of the knowledge which he lacks of his own volition. Whatever the immediate object, it is ultimately the intention that counts and adjudicates the blame, call the transgression by what name you will. The sun of good is in the heavens and the transgressor has chosen to act with his eyes sealed.

Such is the verification of the ideas. Whatever is, maintains itself for a longer or shorter time by virtue of its association with the good. The limits of the idea are broad and inclusive. Not impossibly—in fact, quite

certainly—Plato was prepared to find merit, as I have mentioned, in a table or a bed. Even his τὸ καλόν or the beautiful is not an exclusively æsthetic reality by any means, as appears from his condemnation of art for art's sake as an imitation of an imitation. That Plato, if not Socrates himself, had hoped for an explanation of the universe on such lines from Anaxagoras' *nous* is evident from the *Phædo*.⁵¹ Such a relation, as is virtually stated in so many words, would have consisted of a redintegration of "physiology" or physics in terms of the idea as comprehensible alone; that is to say, it would have amounted to a final reason, a kind of teleology. That it was not forthcoming was as sore a disappointment to Plato as to his Socrates, if we may judge by his constant preoccupation with the quandary of the one and the many and his inability in later life to resolve it or to rid himself of the second member of his dualism—that something else standing over against the moral and rational, the irreducible "other."

For Plato, then, the universe in the broad sense, the all or aggregate, divides into two worlds, the intelligible and the sensible. The principle of the former is the idea of good. The principle of the latter is necessity. It is the principle of change and variation and multiplicity; it accounts for "progress"—for generation and growth and decay. It is the element of incoherence, confusion, and indistinction—the source of error, illusion, and insecurity. As far as this world is explicable at all, it consists of simulacra of the ideas, which are comparable in this respect with their own images or reflections in water, constituting our objects and things—or what we are coming for the nonce to call with greater propriety "events." But while the ideas are of themselves each one and simple⁵² as well as eternal and immutable, the copies or imitations, which make up the phenomenal world, are not only transitory and impermanent but many, perhaps innumerable, in accordance with the nature of indetermination and illimitability, for infinity was to Plato as to the Greeks in general a property if not the essence of imperfection.

As shadows or effigies, however inadequate, it is not impossible that objects—or should I say space-time events?—possess a certain or rather an uncertain semblance of reality which lends them some sort of relative significance or importance; they have their uses for the moral nature if only as reminders of the *ideas*. If they are considered perspectively as subjects of observation, it may be said without excessive impropriety that inasmuch as they are manifested as sensible imitations, owing their phantasmal existence to the *ideas*, the *ideas* themselves come to appear amid them in

⁵¹ 96-100.

⁵² See *Meno*, 72d, and notice the peculiar form of the question.

the semblance of essences, which, as we catch their fleeting apparitions, seem to us to inform the flux without being intrinsic to it. The effect is illusory, to be sure, since of the inner character, the self of that world we know nothing. The stuff of it, if it has a stuff, we are acquainted with only as phenomena, and these phenomena are only similitudes, while to *ideas* and phenomena there is no common ground but this fugitive and accidental resemblance.⁵³

With the exception, therefore, of the ideas, which are the sole denizens of the intelligible world, and as such constitute the only genuine reality, experience consists exclusively of the "other," the sensible or phenomenal, which has the sort of existence attached to becoming and, aside from its transience, is irrational, and on that score unreal and specious. It may force or coerce or compel us as far as we are partly engaged in it; but it fails to convince us. We may sense or feel it; we may conceivably recognize certain of its phases, even when they bear no resemblance to a celestial archetype; we may possibly formulate certain of its concomitants of change, as Plato thinks in the *Philebus*; but our "laws" are only problematic notations, as it were of chance and probability.⁵⁴ Its affiliation is with the mechanic mind, which is itself a parallel of the mutable, as William James' expressive phrase, "the stream of consciousness," recognizes, and which moves with it by a habit of association in a kind of "bastard reasoning." From our higher nature and being it is, however, hopelessly estranged.

On the whole, then, we shall not be so very wide of the mark if we think thus of this sensible world, this seat of unreason and necessity, of impermanence and mutability—we shall not go far astray if we conceive of becoming in its ceaseless unrest as falling occasionally, like a reek of vapor or a fume of smoke, into certain patterns, distinguishable from the usual meaningless huddle proper to it. As dispositions or forms these patterns are not in the nature of the flux at all, nor do they belong to it any more than the constellations belong to the celestial topography. They are counterfeits or simulations, like the figures we see in the clouds, though the closer the resemblance the more real the apparition (if I may use such an expression), the phenomenal in such instance being not merely an appearance but as it were an evidence, and borrowing in that manner a sense which it does not possess of itself but which remains the exclusive property of the idea that it happens to resemble, while any concourse or confluence, any whirl or eddy that fails to effect such a con-

⁵³ See the parable of the cave at the opening of Book VII of the *Republic*.

⁵⁴ It is not irrelevant to note that J. M. Keynes considers induction a proper subject for treatment in his *Treatise on Probability*. All our "laws," therefore, would reduce to statistical averages and necessity itself to chance, as seems indeed to be the direction of modern thought.

figuration, as well as any wisp or outlying fringe that fails to conform to the implicit design, is likely to escape attention as meaningless and irrelevant. In short the ideas are patterns to which objects and things—or events, if you prefer—conform. These are the patterns into which the latter fall. Whenever we find what falls into a pattern, or conforms to an intelligible order, there we may be sure that we are looking upon the imitation or similitude of an idea—only an imitation, but still an indication—an evidence to real being.

So it is, for example, by the recurrence of such fortuitous patterns that we become confirmed or at least reassured of our belief in such another world, a world of ultimate reality. Indeed, it is only by such recurrence as feigning a kind of persistence or permanence, that mimetic forms which are never twice alike exactly but only approximately, come to seem important or pertinent in the first place. The very fact that they are repeated in some fashion gives them a sanction or guarantee as though symbolic and purposive, like a recurrent dream. Possibly, if such a combination is repeated frequently, it tends to become a habit, maintaining itself loosely and precariously but with a relative degree of stability (in the midst of the flux) as we see a civilization or a culture doing, though absolute security is not to be expected or hoped for, and for that it has come together, it must dissolve again. Nevertheless there is a possibility, since we are swimming in the same medium, that we may do something, when we have recognized a contour as of an idea, to preserve it for a span like a bubble, or blow another in its place, or even, as Plato would do in his *Republic*, create something of the sort deliberately after a model laid up in heaven.

On the contrary, injustice, to take a specific instance, is merely in the concrete the want or absence of justice. It is a negative or chaotic state or condition, though a positive evil. It is not-being, essentially, or unreality (τὸ μὴ ὂν); the lack of pattern or form, sheer indetermination and chaos. In this respect not-being is, to be sure, "other," something else than, with reference to justice; but from the point of view of reality it is *néant*, or nihilism, too, just as Parmenides took it to be. It is an inconsequent swirl or eddy, the rheum of change, comparable with a crowd of human beings who have happened together somehow—by force of necessity, by dint of the whirl—on the corner of the street, but who consist in no one purpose or end and can be covered or taken up in no one expression, who as a crowd are nothing at all, neither a family nor a society nor an association nor aught else save illusion. But of what mischief is such a congeries capable! And the comparison will hold of all the vices in contradistinction from the virtues. As a life loses the pattern of its virtue, it

falls apart and disintegrates into a shapelessness and confusion; it becomes as it were a center of disorder and demoralization. Hence in this sense there need be no ideas of evil at all, so Plato thought, since evil is merely the incoherence of becoming—illusory in respect that it is irrelevant and unavailing, that it means nothing and points to nothing, that it fails to compose and is dissolute, but maleficent too in that it is conjoined with necessity and subversive of reality.

Of the moral world, therefore, the world of ideas, it is possible, according to Plato, to learn something. Of this world, however, we know and can know little or nothing. Of its self we are quite ignorant and always shall be. Only as it happens here and there and diversely to resemble the Platonic forms may we hope to make anything of it. Hence the ideas may be spoken of, not as phenomenal causes, but as causes of the intelligibility of phenomena, since it is solely by such resemblance that they appear at all and are distinguishable from the formlessness of change as such. And further, since without this resemblance there would be no phenomena, only a nebulous lapsing, it is permissible to speak of the ideas as the cause of the existence of such phenomena, or simply of phenomena.

In what precedes I have been trying to take a general survey of the doctrine of ideas as Plato himself, so it seems to me, saw it at the summit of his discovery. In so doing I have touched upon several points which I should by good right have reserved for detailed examination elsewhere, if they were to be mentioned at all. But then I am not trying to be exhaustive; I have been rather concerned to comprehend and discriminate, to catch, as best I could, the feature and expression of the doctrine before it was altered by the cast of afterthought. The title *doctrine*, therefore, is itself almost a misnomer for what I have been trying to get at. As every philosophy should be, it is a vision, and like all vision it is subject to the conditions of mental perspective. For practical purposes it requires, as its author admits in the *Philebus*, the collaboration of that vulgar science which enables us, when once abroad, to find our way home again; for I do not know that Plato would deny that becoming has its own ways and hence its own "laws" and formulae—only that those ways are ultimately knowable and have to do with human happiness or well-being. In itself his philosophy is not a map or chart; it is a picture of the vista which is opened before the eye of the mind by the moral consciousness at its proper elevation. Suppose that we had to represent all the features of nature by mechanical drawing, geometrically, without point of view or atmosphere, in a single plane or projection? Such is analogically the task of rationalism, scientific and metaphysic, realistic and

idealistic.⁵⁵ The result may be uniform and consistent, it may even have a deceptive air of completeness and finality, to which its self-complacency contributes not a little. But it is hardly recognizable; it is not a likeness. It is a tabulation, a plot or graph. The association of philosophy is, not with science, or even with metaphysics, but with ethics and religion. And to the simple moral sense Platonism, inexact and unfinished though it may be, presents a sketch of consciousness more convincing than the labored diagrams of metaphysics.

IV

Nevertheless the story requires an epilogue, unfit though I am to write it. That Plato did not rest in the general conception which I have been outlining so roughly, I have already suggested. Anyone who has read below the surface of his language can not have failed, in spite of his partiality for the world of ideas, to realize how severely his spirit was exercised by the riddle of becoming. Formally there are distinguishable amid the folds of his development as a whole three cares or anxieties—one, ethical or moral; another, logical or dialectic or epistemological, however one elects to lay the emphasis; and a third, cosmological or scientific. In the earlier dialogues through the *Republic* the moral is the paramount or predominant issue, the dialectic being incidental and ancillary. In the *Theætetus* and the *Sophist* the second concern is in the ascendant and the difficulty is to reconcile its interests with the preceding and to harmonize the two orders of consideration—a difficulty that is perhaps more serious for the reader than for Plato himself, who has at times a rather disconcerting way of cutting old acquaintances when they threaten to become inconvenient. Finally in the *Timæus* the third theme or motive comes to the fore and is fused with the first in a fashion which, I must confess, I do not find wholly satisfactory or free from ambiguity.

For Plato, to begin with, the *ideas* are essentially moral conceptions. This is to me with my limited sympathies, I may as well acknowledge, his significant moment, and it is this moment that I have tried to sketch with its more serious implications. But as Plato saw them at this time, the ideas—there can be no doubt on this point—were for him the source and principle (the ἀρχή) of knowledge and reality. Hence he found himself involved first in an epistemological and second in an ontological quandary.

The epistemological problem made it necessary for him to assign *ideas*, not merely to moral values and obligations, but also to everything

⁵⁵ That I am justified in lumping them is shown by the tendency of current science to convert itself into metaphysics and *vice versa*; while as for realism and idealism, what in the world are they up to anyway?

knowable or even perceptible, ordures and what not, as well. With this difficulty he wrestles in the *Parmenides*—it can hardly be said triumphantly. All that he succeeds in showing at best is that his system is no worse than its rivals (and involves no more glaring inconsistencies than they do). As for the methodology of cognition, the manner in which the *ideas* are to be supposed to lend intelligibility to phenomena, the subject is barely broached.

On the other hand for the solution of the ontological problem he has to thank what I can only call a recourse to a kind of theistic religion, such as is quite foreign to his earlier thought and the whole context of his speculation. In order to supply his *ideas* with the efficiency wanting to their original conception, and in order to account for the coincidence of the intelligible and the sensible worlds, he finds himself reduced to the invention of a demiurge whose sole office it is to shape and order creation after the pattern of the forms, which now appear undisguisedly as architectonic models or paradigms. In this manner he is able to explain to himself at last the apory that had vexed him for so many years, the resemblance of being and becoming.

To this curious synthesis of religion and positivism which characterizes the *Timæus* he was prompted not improbably by the revival or rehabilitation of science during the first half of the fourth century, particularly under the influence of Archytas and the so-called Pythagoreans.⁵⁶ The discovery of irrational quantities, the inscription of the last of the five regular solids in the sphere by Theætetus, the conjecture of the general shape of the earth and the distrust of its immobility, the foundation of stereometry, the ingenious schematization of the planetary movements by Eudoxus—all these innovations and renovations undoubtedly had the effect of whetting Plato's curiosity and inducing him, in reversal of his position in the *Phædo*, to undertake, like so many later metaphysicians, such as Schelling and Hegel, for example, a complete *Natur-Philosophie*, as though nature were a branch of mathematics—a notion that he seems to have fastened unshakably upon our thought.

It is important, however, to notice that even to the end there is in Plato's cosmological construction no material substratum, no matter proper, as there is no matter in the "solid" geometry so called by which it was inspired. It is a stereometry and consists exclusively of forms (εἶδη) and simulacra, reducible in the last analysis to triangles of one kind or another. All that is required for such a world is space or place for the figures that constitute it. In short, Plato's physical existent, his perceptible world, reduces ultimately to figure; it is exactly the configuration of space, as

⁵⁶ See Erich Frank: *Plato und die sogenannten Pythagoreer*.

correlative with the *ideas* or εἶδη themselves, devoid, as it were, of mass and inertia and such adscititious properties as we have invented from time to time in the interests of ponderability and impenetrability and persistence. Nor is it difficult to visualize space to ourselves in this manner, to perceptualize the ὁρατόν,—after the fashion, perhaps, of the ideal figures and numbers in which Plato may then have been thinking. From this point of view it is possible even to glimpse a kind of rationale for what is no doubt the most bewildering of his transformations, the substitution of the ideal numbers for the forms. If the *ideas* are to be patterns of actuality, then as long as they remain qualitative as they began, actuality as far as it is intelligible must be qualitatively constituted too. But with this interpretation a geometrical world would have been inconsistent. Before such a world could come into existence, even in discourse, it was necessary that its patterns should assume a quantitative or mathematical character. And this condition Plato apparently tried to meet without sacrificing the qualitative character of his ἀρχή or first principle altogether. Hence the baffling intricacies of the final numerical doctrine with its commingling of quality and quantity, its confusion of figures and symbols, a doctrine which no one has ever succeeded in adequately expounding or even stating.

And there is still another element of bewilderment. In his dialogues at least, it is to be noticed, Plato has kept his mathematics intact. They consist invariably of definitions, axioms, and postulates, together with the deductions therefrom. But as time went on, he failed to keep his ontology equally clear. To illustrate my meaning in an elementary way:—suppose in geometry he had finally ceased to reason from his definition of parallel lines as equidistant to the conclusion that they never meet; and had taken to measuring the distance between their representations in the drawings of the mathematicians, by the best substitutes that he possessed for instruments of precision; or better suppose that he had ceased to demonstrate deductively and on principle that the sum of the three angles of the triangle is equal to two right angles and had taken mechanical measurements instead⁵⁷—what would have been the result of such a sort of operation? Mere proximation and average as in the case of “scientific law,” or else some sort of compromise or evasion for the sake of “saving appearances” such as we are familiar with in current scientific metaphysics. But as a matter of fact what else is happening to his *ideas* in their ontological aspect in the course of the *Sophist*, if not of the *Theætetus*, when

⁵⁷ “Es konnte die Forderung gestellt werden, auf die geometrischen Ideale zu verzichten und sich lediglich im Kreise des Sinnlich-Wahrnehmbaren zu halten.”—Ernst Cassirer: *Das Erkenntnisproblem*, 3. Aufl., Bd. II, s. 371.

not-being (τὸ μὴ ὄν) shifts into the other (θάτερον), and the genera (γέννη), if not the ideas themselves, betray an equally alarming readiness to change their spots by a kind of inductive contamination under our very eyes?

At the same time Plato's reversion to scientism in these respects must not blind us to his accompanying conversion to what appears like a creative religion. That Plato's was ever a religious nature I take to be beyond dispute. But the religion of his earlier years, if I may so put it, had always been a diffused religion. It consisted in a rooted conviction of man's intellectual kinship with a something in the universe—an order, a propriety, a nature (or structure) not unlike his own and partially comprehensible by it, but higher and greater and better—and together with this conviction a devout acceptance of the obligation imposed by that relationship. It was a feeling that had for long been satisfied by the *ideas* and supremely by the idea of the good. For Plato they had constituted the divine; for his Parthenon is after all either myth or poetry—his manner of realizing verbally and imaginatively, of picturing, if you please, these influences and presences. Nor is his creator a substitute for the Zeus of popular belief or superstition. As a demiurge he is obstructed, if not baffled, by the intractableness of necessity, the recalcitrancy of the flux, and can at best work only in conformity with the *ideas*, which exist independently and in their own right. Whether he is in any sense a personality of himself is questionable. And the question, fair or not, will obtrude whether he was in the first instance much more than an expedient for coördinating *ideas* and phenomena—for the resolution of Plato's ontological problem.

And yet perhaps to look upon the introduction of the demiurge and his activities as a mere device to explain the immanence or presence of the *forms* is to ignore the optimism of Plato's old age. I would not speak of Plato with disrespect; but I can not overlook that characteristic of advancing years—it may be (I speak humbly and in ignorance) but a kind of ripeness and wisdom to which I have not attained—

“Man must endure his going hence
Even as his coming hither—ripeness is all—”

but at all events I cannot ignore that trait of age which so often induces a man to build a great house when he has little or no time to live in it, and which leads him so often to shut his eyes to the menace of evil or the horror of the shades, or to seek for hope and consolation in the promptings of his own desires, as it were the instinct of self-preservation *in extremis*, as though one could build a fortress against death and by denying render it of no effect. But whether I have put the motive properly or not, it is clear from the *Timæus* and from the tenth book of the *Laws*

that Plato was moving out of his former courses toward a kind of monistic optimism prefiguring in many respects the philosophy of stoicism.⁵⁸

But this is not the phase upon which I prefer to dwell. It might very well be that my view of the later dialogues is mistaken. But in any case I would always return to those clear and simple colloquies in which the splendor of the ideas remains forever untroubled and untarnished.

⁵⁸ I may add perhaps in apology of my presumption that it is in some such light that Constantin Ritter finally sees him too.

IV

THE SOPHISTS

It is to the early Greek thinkers, to the Ionians and their successors, I suppose, that we are indebted in the first instance for the conception of a physical nature, that aggregate of "things and their forces," in Huxley's phrase, which for reasons of our own we have come to regard as the sole reality of any particular importance. Whether we ascribe this result to discovery or invention or discrimination will depend very largely on the character of our philosophy. Undoubtedly primitive speculation had little sense of those distinctions, obvious as they now appear, which we have resumed in such terms as physical, ethical, social, political, religious, and the like. Not that the original Greek observer was destitute of such ideas but that he had still to segregate them; his universe, like his consciousness, was relatively undifferentiated. The order of nature and the course of justice, mind and mechanism, causation and conation, perception, cognition, conception mingled in inextricated confusion not only for "physiologists" like Anaximander and Anaxagoras but for later comers like Heraclitus and Empedocles. And yet by the middle of the fifth century at least philosophy had succeeded after a fashion in isolating the germ of materialism—the notion of an exclusively mechanical system, the atoms and the void, comparable if not identical with our own.

But significant as this achievement may seem from our point of view—for it is not impossible that we have exaggerated its "scientific" importance—we owe at all events an equal, if not a still greater debt to that loosely associated band of itinerant publicists of whom Protagoras has come by force of his ability to serve as a kind of unofficial leader and spokesman and who are known ambiguously enough as Sophists. To be sure, the word *publicist* is as much of a misnomer as *sophist*, the Sophists themselves having no common specification as they have no common definition. But while collectively they formed no school or sect, each playing pretty much for his own hand, yet in spite of their extreme individualism they did at least form a kind of clique or coterie, more or less connected and affiliated by their business; and in trading upon the ambitions of the public upon whom they depended for their livelihood they acquired at all events the unity such as it was of their clientele. In as far as their customers possessed a common mind and taste, they were professionally bound to cultivate that particular stripe of opinion under penalty of losing their trade. And as their patrons were grouped, so would they naturally group themselves. In the event, then, though they were neither sages on the one hand nor on the other statist or politicians, their anxieties were social

and practical, "real" and "timely," within the current meaning of the terms—a circumstance that accounts perhaps for recent attempts, beginning with Grote, to rehabilitate their memories after so many centuries of obloquy. Without going so far, however, we may in justice accord them this one merit at least: in spite of their shortcomings they were the first to expose in something like clear relief the outlines of that conception of "men and their ways," to quote Huxley again, which we now designate in its various aspects by the Procrustean title of humanism.

Of the elder or first generation Sophists, whom Plato dramatizes after his usual fashion in his dialogues, the most prominent are Protagoras, Gorgias, Prodicus, and Hippias. To complete the list there may be added Gorgias's understudy Polus and the otherwise obscure Callicles, much as the latter might resent inclusion with some others of the gentry. Nor should the inimitable Euthydemus and Dionysodorus be forgotten—to say nothing of the obstreperous Thrasymachus, who is capable of speaking sufficiently for himself.

How equivocal is the name of Sophist, in any event, is clear from the circumstance that even after the word had developed its invidious connotation of a mere pretender to learning, it was still used more or less indiscriminately of sage and charlatan alike, not infrequently by the same author, and was never again fixed, like our term, in a single denotation. And while Plato employs it pretty consistently, though he does on occasion draw a distinction between Sophists like Protagoras and rhetoricians like Gorgias, whose instruction was oratorical and forensic, still even his application of the term was in any particular instance a matter of discretion and open to dispute and contradiction. Nevertheless on a single point the users of the word in its pejorative sense are unanimously agreed; their Sophists have one common characteristic: whether taking part in public affairs or not, they all pretended to impart the secret of success to those who would do so—in a word they were all professed and professional teachers.

It has been remarked of them by one of our own critics that in reference to their time, they combined the two modern rôles of "journalist" or editor and professor. But the comparison, while ingenious, is not quite accurate in introducing a meaningless distinction. Their nearest counterpart is the present-day "educator," with his appetite for publicity and his turn for propaganda—especially the professor of pedagogy, as he used to be called before he had the naïve assurance to confiscate the whole province of human culture for his own. Nor is the word "educator" without its own duplicity either. An educator properly would be and once was a teacher of any sort or kind, one engaged in the onerous, if

no longer honored, service of education. But by some hocus-pocus the designation, with all its question-begging implications, has been arrogated to their own use by the members of a self-constituted profession who pretend, like their ancient prototypes, to have reduced education—in imitation of other interests of our time, not excepting literary criticism—to the status of a “science,” more or less exact or at least terminological, and have come to figure in their own conceit, not as mere educators themselves, but—the quirk is curious—as educators of educators. In their hands “education” so called has become, like rhetoric ancient and modern, a purely formal subject, pretty well indifferent to matter and concerned mainly for method—a knowledge of knowledge, the knowledge “which conveys no other knowledge than itself,”¹ such as Plato contemptuously turns his back upon in the *Charmides* and *Euthydemus*. The parallel is so nearly exact that we are in no great danger of aiming wild if we think of the Sophists in their popular rôle as the “educators” of their time, intent, like those with whom we are personally acquainted, on making of education not only a trade but a business.

Now, if it is true that Socrates, as many of his analogies suggest, looked upon every occupation, even that of statesmanship, as a kind of craft, requiring for its successful practice a certain amount of technical or specialized skill, then it is difficult to understand why he should have quarrelled with the Sophists for making of education a trade in its turn. In this respect it is not impossible that Plato has given us in the long run a false or exaggerated impression in his own sense. On the evidence of the *Memorabilia* and the earlier Platonic dialogues themselves it hardly appears that Socrates viewed the Sophists with the unrelenting animosity that came to characterize his disciple's later years. His tone is at worst, rather, one of ridicule sharpened with sarcasm, as in the *Apology*,² and at best one of indulgent tolerance; on occasion he even recommends them to unacceptable candidates for his own fellowship. Plato, for his own part we must suppose, exhibits—is it much worse than a kind of grudging consideration for Protagoras and certainly for the aged Gorgias in the dialogues which bear their names, though to be sure he displays little enough regard for Hippias and the smaller fry.

No, what offended Socrates and Plato, to begin with, was undoubtedly the Sophists' habit of teaching for hire rather than the nature of their ideas.³ Had they not themselves dabbled in the same questionable sources—as pupils, Socrates of Anaxagoras and Plato of Cratylus the dumb-show man, the disciple of Heraclitus the Dark? And had they not lain

¹ *Euthydemus*, 292d.

² 19e-20c.

³ *Memorabilia*, I, vi, 13.

under the same imputation of skepticism and innovation? It was only later when Plato's clairvoyance was sufficiently developed to detect the mischievous consequences of the Sophistic propaganda, as they too began to discover themselves undisguisedly—for after all it was the Sophistic inheritance that Plato was best acquainted with—it was only then, when the genuine issues became clear to him, that he came to resent so acrimoniously the entire movement and its proponents near and remote.

In the first instance, however, the traffic in learning, as though education were a commodity that could be peddled for a price, would appear in itself sufficiently vicious to inspire distrust of the whole profession even in the insensitive minds of the general public. As indeed it is. With the possible exception of subjects of a strictly utilitarian or "vocational" sort such as may be turned to the pecuniary advantage of the purchaser, the practice was felt to degrade all instruction to the level of a staple, subject solely to the law of supply and demand. And while at the present time education has become so thoroughly commercialized that such a custom no longer seems shocking, yet in the case of the original Sophists it was still hard for the unspoiled intelligence to reconcile their claims to the possession of a knowledge indispensable to human happiness and well-being—to say nothing of their pretensions to high-mindedness—with their willingness to trade upon that knowledge or even to withhold it until their cupidity was satisfied. So at least many of the Athenians felt. Hucksters and hawkers are the least unflattering names that Plato finds for them; while innumerable are his jibes and scoffs at their venality. Professional hunters of young men for fees on the pretense of preparing them for citizenship, such is the manner in which he describes them in the *Sophist* and to the same effect the Socrates of the *Cratylus*: "If I had only been able to afford his fifty-drachma course of lectures,"⁴ so he sneers at Prodicus, "I were capable of telling you all about this matter of language; but unfortunately I have only had the benefit of his one-drachma lecture." To be sure, these rates do not seem particularly exorbitant nowadays—a drachma being worth about a shilling; and though tradition has it that Protagoras charged his pupils the round sum of a hundred minæ or in the neighborhood of two thousand dollars,⁵ still Isocrates remarks of Gorgias, who appears to have been his leader, that in spite of his long life—he lived to be over a hundred—and his unusual opportunities for amassing a fortune, he left but a few thousand dollars behind him at his death.⁶ Nevertheless, so touchy were the Greeks on the subject, particularly if tradition is to be trusted, in this case of Prodicus, who had

⁴ *Cratylus*, 384b.

⁵ Diogenes Laertius, IX, 52.

⁶ "A thousand staters"—*De Permutatione*, 155-157.

agents to search out young men of family and wealth for him,⁷ that Plato finds it well within the dramatic proprieties to put into the mouth of his Protagoras a kind of apology of his own fair-dealing with his pupils in the matter of fees. For his part, he says, he has arranged his charges on a special plan. "When any one has had lessons from me, he pays me the sum that I ask if he like; if not, he goes to a temple, takes oath to the value he sets on what he has learned from me, and disburses me that amount."⁸ And this trait may be regarded, I think, as indicative of an uneasy consciousness of their vulnerability at this point on the part of the more scrupulous members of the profession. What was likely to become of education under this system we can see by comparing the state of things at present.⁹

As for Socrates in his own person, it is not unlikely that he felt even for the most eminent representatives of the clique that sort of amused contempt which common sense has for those who preach without practising. Unquestionably his idea of education was influenced in no small measure by his relation of master workman and apprentice, the master being qualified as an instructor by his application, as well as by his possession, of knowledge. In fact some such scruple may have lurked behind his own disclaimers of competence as sage and teacher. For if right action is impossible, as he believed, without exact knowledge, it is not entirely unreasonable, since the two are correlative, to look upon the one as the sign of the other. Of such proficiency at all events as he was willing to recognize, the Sophists, with the possible exception of Protagoras, had given little or no proof; they were neither the statesmen nor even the citizens whose craft they undertook to teach; they were strangers in a strange land, without residence or domestication, travelling salesmen and touts for their own concerns. And while an exception might be taken in the case of the rhetoricians, who were eloquent enough in all conscience, still their subject itself was empty of instruction, a bladder of flattery and persuasion, an imposture equally with sophistry, like cookery and cosmetics—an opinion which Plato, no doubt, would share with him.

But, after all, Plato's suspicions, when he began to write, must have gone deeper than a mere distaste, call it snobbish or priggish if you like, for the Sophists' mercenary motives, deeper than a respectful deference to his master's prejudices or prepossessions. As teachers or educators for hire the Sophists were under the necessity of deferring to any wind that gave promise of filling their sails. For their experience of human nature,

⁷ Philostratus. See Diels, 77 H, 1a.

⁸ *Protagoras*, 328b.

⁹ Pythodorus, general in Sicily, 427, spent 100 minæ on a Sophistic training (*Camb. Anc. Hist.*, vol. V, p. 225). Proxenus the Bœotian, the friend of Xenophon's, was a pupil of Gorgias.

from which their humanism was in great part derived, they were unavoidably indebted to those with whom they were most intimately associated. And reciprocally, in the very process of adapting their knowledge to their pecuniary advantage, they were likely to be affected to a greater or less degree in their own characters. In particular were they warped in these respects by that portion of their public to which they immediately appealed, those ambitious and not always over-scrupulous young men, like Alcibiades, upon whom as followers and disciples they depended for their reputation and income. They were obliged at the same time to deprecate, as far as possible, the disapproval of the general, which might otherwise have imperilled their security, as it did Anaxagoras', and to adapt their teaching, revolutionary though it might be, to the social conditions in which they found themselves, not merely for the sake of safeguarding their own persons but for the sake of satisfying the political ambitions of their pupils. That they were not completely successful at all points is no great matter for amusement. On the whole Gorgias appears to have been the most adept at this sort of thing, for tradition preserves a note of admiration for his adroitness in recommending Hellenic unity to the Athenians, while he dexterously avoided shocking the Athenian passion for empire by any explicit reference to a friendly understanding with the other cities, dwelling on their triumphs over the Persians with the implication that victories over the barbarians were occasions for rejoicings in contrast with those over Greeks.¹⁰ But Protagoras, on the contrary, who was confident enough in boasting of his occupation, suffered the mortification of being expelled from Athens and having his books, all that could be collected of them, burned in the market-place; while Prodicus for all his precautions is supposed to have died of hemlock no less than Socrates.¹¹ Under the circumstances it is intelligible enough that none of them should have been able to avoid the danger of degenerating into charlatans on the one hand or trimmers on the other and opportunists on both.

To the Athenian of the period in which Plato was personally interested man had become in the words of Aristotle's famous definition, a "political" animal almost exclusively. That is to say, in modern terms, he was not merely an intellectual, moral, and social being, though he was all these too; but he was essentially and above all a public character. Not only did he feel himself most at home when abroad in the city—in the agora, the gymnasium, the palæstra, the theatre; as a member of a small and exigent democracy he was a citizen the greater part of the time—not by fits and starts as with us, at odd moments of a periodic election or the like; he was continually in service, as a soldier, a dicast, an ecclesiast, a liturgist.

¹⁰ Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists*, I, 9.

¹¹ I give this gossip for what it may be worth—as a posterior recognition of the perils to which the Sophists must have been exposed from the general public.

So narrow were the dimensions of the state that all its interests were bound to seem peculiarly instant and pressing, as all its members were bound to appear in the light of neighbors, in the guise either of personal friends or rivals. As a free man, if this be freedom to live without privacy, his privilege as well as his duty was the government and on that account he guarded and cultivated it jealously. His own interests were inextricably bound up with the policies of his country, if not completely absorbed by them. And as his existence so was his ambition—to attain authority in the affairs of his city and among his fellow-citizens.

That Plato himself inherited what had come to be a kind of tradition in his day and in his family is clear enough from his constant preoccupation with statecraft and the constitution of society. Nor is there much doubt of his chagrin at finding himself debarred from a public career, whether by virtue of his own conscientious scruples or by force of adverse circumstances, so that in taking up the cudgels against Callicles in favour of the philosophic as contrasted with the political life as he does in the *Gorgias* he has perhaps a little the air of making a virtue of necessity. But however he may have come by his final conviction of the viciousness of democratic politics, the sincerity of that conviction is unquestionable—as is the depth of his aversion for those whom he felt to be responsible for it.

For it was to this very vice, as he saw it, that the Sophists had catered in their address to the young men who flocked about them; and in so doing, if they had not directly and at first hand infected their own contemporaries, had fastened the evil upon their countrymen. What they offered in exchange for their hire was a complete preparation for public life, or in our language, "citizenship." To be sure they had not the foresight to anticipate the modern cant of "service" as a cloak for the self-seeking activities which they encouraged; they had few pretensions to altruism or humanitarianism—that was reserved for the Antisthenic heresy of Stoicism. But they did, the cannier of them like Protagoras, make a great pretense of virtue. "Young man," he says to Hippocrates, who is thinking of joining his classes, "on the very day you first attend them you will go home a better man; and so on day by day you will continue to improve unceasingly."¹² Even Gorgias, who is praised among his fellows by Meno, with the tacit concurrence of Anytus, the Sophist-baiter, for his freedom from this sort of hypocrisy,¹³ is driven to admit, when cornered, an esteem for justice as a prerequisite for public life, and a willingness and ability to impart it to his pupils.¹⁴ Prodicus finds his affair

¹² *Protagoras*, 318a.

¹³ *Meno*, 95c.

¹⁴ *Gorgias*, 460a-b.

in a highly edifying apologue of the youthful Hercules and the solicitations of the forward Kakia, alias Eudaimonia, who is finally dismissed, we must suppose, for her more respectable, if less seductive rival Arete.¹⁵ Of such disguises, however, convenient as they may have seemed to men of greater prudence like Protagoras, Gorgias, and Prodicus, their hardier and bolder colleagues and admirers Polus, Callicles, and Thrasymachus were frankly disdainful. And not only so; they were equally free in proclaiming the incentive by which they actually drew and held their youthful clientele—the possibilities of personal advantage and promotion opened to their ambition by the prospect of democratic leadership.

Democracy and leadership! And what, pray, we may ask with Plato, is leadership in a democracy but demagoguery? Whose instrument is oratory—not philosophy or “science” either in the Greek or in the English sense, but rhetoric, the art of flattery and persuasion, or, as Plato has it, the trick of inducing irrational belief. Such, to make a distinction rather than a difference, was the special subject of the rhetors, like Gorgias, who boasts—they are always boasting—that it was the orators not the architects that built the walls of Athens. And while the Sophist might be supposed in strictness to busy himself after a braver fashion with legislation or statecraft, our “political science” so called, yet in the nature of the case every Sophist was perforce a rhetorician too. Like the rhetorician he gloried, after the example of Protagoras, in his ability to speak on either, or for that matter on both, sides of every question and to make the weaker cause appear the stronger. In short, there is so little to choose between rhetor and Sophist that Plato finds his own distinction untenable and abandons it in the long run. Not virtue, not justice—however they might shuffle when pushed—was their common means and aim—but expediency and success, policy and preferment.

Naturally the youth of the period were not immune to the kind of virus which the Sophists had to administer—if it were not that the latter chose their toxin with particular reference to their patients. It is hard to say whether the victim invites his exploiter or *vice versa*; probably the election is mutual. But the youth with whom the Sophists had to deal was a peculiar one. Youth is a disquiet and uneasy age at best. And yet as long as the spirit of the age—what we used quaintly to call the *Zeitgeist*—is strong enough to engage their activity and to impart a favourable bent to their activity, their restlessness is rather an advantage than the contrary. Their impetuosity and enthusiasm may as likely as not make them agents, even advance-agents, of progress—provided the current which carries them is setting in that direction. But unfortunately the age of the

¹⁵ Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, II, 1, 21.

Sophists was itself a backwater, a period of unsettlement and indirection. The very causes that had so recently brought about the material prosperity of Athens were already at work upon her moral undoing. Hardly had the Persian wars left her pre-eminent among the cities of Greece than she began to take advantage of this supremacy to enrich herself by a kind of fraud with the revenues of the Delian Confederacy and to use them for her own aggrandizement. Wealth, luxury, power, and art had begun to sap the integrity of the national character. The traditional simplicity of manners and the ingenuous piety of the past were lost forever. Politically she had become in fact that most anomalous of human institutions, a democratic empire, exacting tribute from her former allies and wards, and subject to all the ignominious shifts, evasions, and equivocations incident to a false position, until she acquired the cold-blooded cynicism to throw off her disguises and appear to the Melians as what she actually was—a despot. Nor was the Peloponnesian War with its ghastly sequel the Sicilian Expedition so far below the horizon that its ominous shadow might not have been visible to the far-sighted eye of a philosopher. And to all these unsettling influences must be added the gradual incursion of natural or physical philosophy or “science” and its disintegrating effect upon the national consciousness. And yet foreign and inimical as it was to the Athenian genius, that philosophy contained at worst a tincture of animism, a strain of “pan-psychism,” that sufficed to lend it an illusion of intelligibility and ethical significance; it had held out to the open minds of its day like Socrates at least a mirage if not an adequate image of reality—only to break down at last into the “flowing science” of Heraclitus, the first of those hopeless time-philosophies that seem to supervene fatally upon the wreckage of all these grandiose systems of nature, whether metaphysical or positivist. Of the consternation with which the event must have been viewed by serious inquirers it is possible to form some idea from Plato’s moderate and measured account in the *Phædo* of the perplexities of Socrates,

πολλὰς δ’ ὀδὸν ἐλθόντα φροντίδος πλάνοις,

after the disaster, supplemented meagrely as it is by the *Memorabilia*.

“When I was young,” says Socrates, “I was tremendously eager for the kind of wisdom which they call the investigation of nature. I thought it was a glorious thing to know the causes of everything, why each thing comes into being and why it perishes and why it exists at all. . . . Then one day I heard a man reading from a book, as he said by Anaxagoras, that it is the mind which orders and causes all things. And I was pleased with this theory . . . and delighted to think that I had found . . . a teacher of the causes of things quite to my taste. . . . But my glorious

hope was soon snatched away from me. For as I went on with my reading, I saw that the man had made no use of intelligence and did not assign any real causes for the ordering of things, but mentioned as such air and ether and water and many other absurdities. . . . And so it seems to me that most people, using a name that is utterly inappropriate, when they speak of that sort of thing as causes, are but groping as it were in the dark."¹⁶

But why insist? Have we not ourselves been sufferers of a like stupefaction from a very similar disappointment of our own? Have we not ourselves suffered from a similar sense of loss and vacuity, chagrin at the "bankruptcy" of our own grandiloquent science and its specious promises? And yet for the Athenian—if like us he had not taken it already—there was still a further step to go with Leucippus and Democritus, who were to leave him with nothing substantial but the atoms and the void and to reduce morality, if not reality itself, to an affair either of convention or of nature.

To such conditions may be assigned in the main the rise and ascendancy of the Sophists. By them those young and eager spirits who had been so recently bilked of their confidence in "science" were offered a new interest agreeable not only with the temper of their years but with the distemper of the times. While Socrates was trying—not with complete success it must be acknowledged—to find a remedy for the incredulity and libertinage which seem the inevitable outcome of such moments of disenchantment, and by suggesting some principle of personal integrity and control was endeavoring to fill the vacancy left by the lapse of religious and moral conviction and to encourage man to set up of himself a law against his members—and to establish an ethical autonomy or autarchy against the anarchy of self; it was the weakness of the Sophists that they found nothing better to do in the emergency than to flatter the passions and instincts that were reigning at the instant, a source of confusion to their possessors and of danger to society and to culture itself. The quibbles and ingenuities and *doubles entendres* of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, the contempt of Thrasymachus and Callicles for decency and their identification of virtue with temperament and of happiness with pleasure, so like our own contumacious paradoxes, are indicative of the mood of their youthful contemporaries—no less than the rhetorical duplicity of the orators with their conscienceless indifference to subject or theme—and their disregard for consistency in truth. In fact there is preserved in the so-called *Δισσοὶ Λόγοι* or "The Double Tongue" what amounts to a text-book compiled as it might be by a graduate of the

¹⁶ *Phædo*, 96a-99c. Cf. *Sophist*, 242c-243b; *Memorabilia*, I, i, ii, etc.

school for the instruction of students in the politic art of facing both ways. Of the good and the evil, the just and the unjust, the true and the false it furnishes arguments to prove alternately their identity and difference and with equal facility demonstrates that wisdom and virtue are and are not capable of being taught. Whoever the author of this invaluable educational compendium, not so very unlike a modern manual of debate, he would seem to have taken his cue from Protagoras, whose boast to make the weaker reason the stronger (τὸν ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν), insincere if not actually deceitful in itself, was fated to lead into this very kind of ambiguity and confusion, the weaker and the stronger soon becoming precedents for the worse and the better with a complete reversal of normal values.

Nor are the meagre fragments of Protagoras' works that are preserved to us wholly reassuring with respect to his ingenuousness. "About the gods," he remarks, in his essay "On Divinity,"¹⁷ "I can be certain of nothing,—whether they are or are not or what they are like (ὅποιοί τινες ἰδέαν) for there are many hindrances in the way—the obscurity of the subject and the brevity of human life." There is, of course, no little danger of interpreting such detached and scattered dicta, wrenched, as they frequently appear to be, from their context and quoted in connections and for purposes controversial and other which their writers would never have approved. But in this instance the author's practical agnosticism, which would debar the gods from citation in human debate,¹⁸ is attested by the complementary pragmatism of what was undoubtedly his most famous utterance, that sentence from his "Truth" or Ἀλήθεια which strikes the key-note of Sophistic humanism—"Man is the measure of all things; of what is that it is and of what is not that it is not." After this fashion, in denying the existence of a general or universal truth, says Sextus Empiricus,¹⁹ he first introduced relativism into philosophy.²⁰ And to much the same effect Gorgias in his treatise "Concerning Unreality or Nature"²¹ undertakes to maintain three theses: first, there is no such thing as truth; second, even if there were such a thing, it would be unintelligible and past finding out; and third, even if it were intelligible, it would be incommunicable and inexpressible—contentions which he proceeds to demonstrate in a style of reasoning not a little like that of Plato's *Parmenides*.²² While Prodicus describes the whole circle, disposing of divinity and reality

¹⁷ Περὶ Θεῶν. Diels, frag. 5.

¹⁸ Cf. *Theaetetus*, 162d-e.

¹⁹ τίθησι τὰ φαινόμενα ἐκάστω μόνᾳ.

²⁰ τὸ πρὸς τι. Cf. Diels: 74 A, 14.

²¹ Περὶ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ἢ περὶ φύσεως.

²² Diels: 76B, 3.

at a single stroke by making man the measure even of the gods, whom he held, so it is reported, to be merely the apotheosis of whatever and whomever men have found useful or beneficial to themselves.²³

Now, whether the Sophists were altogether sincere in such expressions or spoke and wrote solely out of a vain delight in literary ingenuities and verbal coquetries, for the sake of displaying their rhetorical skill and cockering the self-conceit of their youthful auditors is no great matter. In the latter case it is only their character which is at stake; in the former their philosophy—the one being exposed at worst to the charge of levity; the other to that of shallowness. In neither event is their influence particularly affected. Whatever their convictions, they were at all events, like Huxley, great popularizers. And it is seldom indeed that a popularizer's influence is dependent either on the depth of his thought or on the elevation of his principles. He needs only to cocker his hearers' self-esteem by echoing distinctly what is already ringing confusedly in the recesses of their inner consciousness. The great system-makers are not as a rule those who have had the strongest appeal even with the intelligent public. Had the late William James never written so compendious a work as his *Psychology*, his vogue would have been diminished no whit. His versatility and his timeliness would have seen him through; he knew the word and the season, above all that *καιρός* upon which the original Sophists were always harping. And in whatever manner we take them, as exhibitionists or sciolists—and the two characters are by no means incompatible—the gravity and extent of their influence is unquestionable. The dialogues of Plato are alone sufficient evidence; he at least was not one to expend his strength in an empty bout with shadows or men of straw.

With the extrusion, then, of the divine or spiritual the Sophists had pretty well succeeded in delimiting humanity at the one extremity, and in establishing a precedent of which humanism has seldom or never rid itself. It was not that Protagoras and his immediate followers, any more than their later-day successors, abjured the gods outright; that would have been too impolitic—professed atheism was no more in fashion at Pagan Athens than it was in Renaissance Europe or Victorian England or than it is at present in Methodist America. What they denied of spirituality was relevance tacitly or explicitly. Possibly, like Huxley or Spencer, they would have allowed it a figurative or symbolic sanctuary in poetry or, following the suggestion of William James, would have relegated it under strict censorship to the subconscious. But practically, like Montaigne, having once made it obeisance, though with rather less ceremony, they were content to ignore it and go on about their business, which was so pressingly with this world and its denizens.

²³ Diels: 77 B, 5.

And yet clear as their position appears in this respect, they failed signally to define the other end of the scale with anything like equal precision, being satisfied—for reasons of their own, no doubt—to leave it in an obscurity which continues to becloud it to this day. That it is man that is the measure of all things, and not the pig or the tadpole with which Plato twits him, is so far forth to Protagoras' credit; and Plato himself retracts the taunt on reflection. But there are so many slippery gradations between man and animal—as witness Pyrrho's pig—that practical humanism has never been quite sure of its footing since, or secure against sliding insensibly even past the tadpole to its native ooze.²⁴ In so far the advantage—the argument of historical tendency—lies with Plato, whose sneer had thus much justice in it, despite his retraction, that it did recognize what was indeed the bearing of the whole movement, whether of conventionists or naturists, to confound sooner or later nature and human nature in a single amalgam, obviously and directly on the part of the naturists; but equally so, though less immediately on the part of the conventionists, in denying any sanction to morality other than pure convenience or utility. And this, it must be granted, was equally the inclination of the Renaissance—namely, to run the two natures into one and to integrate man with physics, or mechanics—*machinâ mundi*—only the Renaissance, it would appear, with the assistance of science, carried the work to a successful conclusion, upon which Protestantism with its natural law in the spiritual world, seems to be setting the seal. So life becomes not a psyche but a blind *élan*.

Aside from such confusion, incidental perhaps to its Heraclitean sensationalism—vigorously as Plato protests it on this score—could Protagoras' dogma—for dogma it has virtually become—have ever been anything but *anathema* to him? "Man is the measure of all things." Whatever else the formula may mean, it means at least that man is the sole maker—the "creator" as we like to say—of values, even—as Prodicus would add pragmatically with William James if it were not humanly impertinent—of divinity. "The noblest work of man is god." As a result justice and "the other virtues" are deprived of objective attestation; the whole edifice of *ideas* collapses; and truth and reality, like sensation and perception, become subjective and fail of other authority or sanction than can be found in the convention or the nature to which the Sophists referred. As between these two horns of the dilemma upon which they had cast themselves, it would appear from their own utterances and from Plato's hints and innuendoes that the former alternative was elected by Protagoras,

²⁴ To what particular humane category, for instance, is to be assigned the refined pleasure of scratching oneself incessantly [*Gorgias*, 494d], or for that matter those delights for which Polus envies the Great King and Archelaus of Macedon?

Prodicus, and possibly Gorgias, the latter by Thrasymachus, Polus, Callicles, and Hippias.

To judge by Plato's off-hand and allusive references to it the distinction between nature and convention had become a commonplace by his time. At all events it was sufficiently matter of course to furnish point for a jest.²⁵ But to the historical Socrates it was no doubt a novel polemical weapon and one of which he was not indisposed to avail himself in a pinch, as Plato's Callicles, speaking in character and with verisimilitude, presumably, is shrewd to observe. "And this . . . is your smart trick for getting the better of us; when anyone speaks according to convention you smuggle nature into your interrogations; and contrariwise, if one mentions nature you switch to your convention."²⁶ Evidently it was not always Socrates' methods that distinguished him from his adversaries—the confusion of his contemporaries on that score is not unintelligible—but his principles and, be it added, his conclusions likewise. In the first instance, the controversy would at any rate appear to have revolved about the sanctity of law and custom (the νόμοι). And it is not impossible that the original turn was that given to it or recorded by Xenophon in the discussion between Hippias and Socrates as to whether such institutions are to be considered human or divine in origin—a debate in which Socrates, like Montaigne at a later date, distinguishes, as he does so often.²⁷ Some laws, he is sure, are divine, and unlike those of human provenance, ineluctable.

In Sophistic circles, however, with the abrogation of divinity common to the unqualified humanism of an age of enlightenment, the interest had shifted from the question of legislation as such to that of the law or principle proper to man. As with Socrates it had become an ethical as well as a legal or juridical problem. In this division of opinion Thrasymachus and Callicles come forward as the counsel of nature. "Justice is the convenience of the powerful;" what is agreeable to the strong—that is justice. Like Nietzsche after them they explain existing customs as in the main a defensive or protective mechanism on the part of the weak against the encroachments of the strong and as such subversive of natural—that is, of genuine—right and equity. In effect one party is by all accounts quite as selfish or "instinctive" as the other; so that Socrates is well within his rights in retorting upon Callicles that the weaker and inferior actually turn out in that case to be the mightier.

But while this general attitude of both Thrasymachus and Callicles is very much similar, still it is possible to discriminate, since Plato is hardly

²⁵ *Protagoras*, 337c-d.

²⁶ *Gorgias*, 483a.

²⁷ See *Memorabilia* IV, iv.

likely to have intended a duplication of character in the two of them. Obviously, then, as Socrates' retort indicates, the Sophistic relativity is capable of serving as a principle of democracy as well as of autocracy. If man is the measure of all things and what appears to each is what it appears to him, there will be as many goods as there are individuals. And further, inasmuch as there is no standard, no authority by which the priority of one or another may be settled other than the good-seeming of the individual—since all interests are themselves on an equality, equally good and equally valid—it follows that the only possible decision as between conflicting interests will be some form of might—that of the superior individual, the *bedeutendes Individuum*, at the one extreme, or an overwhelming combination of inferior individuals at the other—tyranny or democracy. In either case indifferently might makes right. But while Thrasymachus for his part is prepared to accept the consequences of the premise and to recognize by force of necessity the might of confederated numbers and the might of native superiority;²⁸ Callicles is willing to acknowledge the latter alone, resenting bitterly the former as a kind of usurpation or abrogation. In other words, Thrasymachus, who seems the more skeptical, the more annihilatory character, considers justice to be but a figment of the imagination, a mere ideal, while Callicles identifies it positively with nature as the Sophists understood it.

At the same time there is no more doubt of Thrasymachus' position as such than of Callicles'. For them both the standard of human nature is set by the "original" spontaneous, the unspoiled "impulsive" primate with the will to power. It is this first of animals that is the "natural man." And Hippias differs with them only in entertaining a more benign and sympathetic sort of primitivism. Like Rousseau's his human nature seems to be endowed with a larger proportion of innate sentimentality. Whatever we may have become by custom we are all kinsmen, he declares, by nature.²⁹ In other words this measure of all things is softened in his thought, as in Wordsworth's, into the innocence of a "child of nature." Indeed, Hippias might have felt at home among the Stoics or even the modern humanitarians.

From this view of human immediacy or "instantaneity" Protagoras and Prodicus dissent—the former, at least, widely. Without transgressing the bounds that he has fixed to humanity he thinks of human nature as capable of correction and rectification by reason and experience, though how this desirable end is to be attained—let alone sighted—in the absence of a determinate standard he unfortunately fails to explain. Pragmatist

²⁸ Compare Thrasymachus' protest or appeal against the encroachments of Archelaus upon Larissa in Thessaly about 400 B. C.

²⁹ *Protagoras*, 337c.

and sensationalist as he is, he believes the race to be improvable—to some extent. Curious that the notion of human “progress” never broke in all its splendor upon the vision of these ancient speculators. Was it that they knew human nature so much better than we do or that their sense of moderation would have shrunk before the illimitable vistas of such a prospect? “Καὶ ἄνθρωπον φρονεῖ!” And thinking neither as a god nor yet quite as an animal Protagoras is evidently not altogether satisfied of the perfection of humanity in its “natural” and untutored state. He even conceives of a better nature in contrast with a worse, though to save his face he is obliged to deny that the one is “truer” than the other. “In education,” he would say according to Plato, “it is necessary to effect a change from one state to a better . . . though no one ever made a man who once thought false think true, since it is impossible to think what is not [τὰ μὴ ὄντα] or other than one feels. But I believe that whereas a bad state of mind will give a man bad thoughts, a good state will give him thoughts of the contrary sort. Such ideas to be sure some call by inexperience true but I call them merely better, the latter than the former, but not true by any manner of means.”⁸⁰

I assume as usual that Plato’s proponents speak after the mind of their historical namesakes and that Plato’s evidence to the views of the latter is at least as good as any other second-hand testimony to that effect which has come down to us. And although in this instance he is confessedly putting his own interpretation upon Protagoras’ philosophy, he could hardly afford, in the interest of his argument, to misrepresent its general tenor while it was still so fresh in men’s memories. And yet for all his ingenuity—for I take it that in this passage from the so-called *Apology* of Protagoras Plato is making the best of Protagoras’ case, feigning, as he says, to hold a brief for him—still for all that, he fails to extricate his client for the moment from the toils which the latter has spun for himself. In fact they are unescapable. What to the pragmatist of the Protagorean stripe is the better or the worse but an opinion, which, as Democritus pointed out, may be invalidated by another opinion to the contrary? And while there may be states or conditions whose relative merit no sane man would dream of disputing, as health in comparison with disease, still in default of an objective criterion—like Plato’s—such unanimity of opinion constitutes merely a fashion like another. Who knows but that in a community of ascetics or visionaries such values might be reversed just as they are with respect to health of soul in the

⁸⁰ *Theaetetus*, 167a-b. I read πονηρὰ ψυχῆς ἔξει rather than πονηρὰς, and supply ἔξει rather than ψυχῇ with χρηστῇ as more agreeable with Protagoras’ reasoning. I should like to call attention also to Protagoras’ predilection for the words ἀμείνων, χρηστῇ, βελτίω as more or less characteristically Sophistic. Cf. Socrates’ summary of Callicles’ creed in *Gorgias*, 488.

every-day world? And yet, although the best to which Protagoras dare consistently aspire is but a "seeming good," still we must in fairness give him credit for catching through his envelopes of error a glimpse of an acquired and superior habit, "a second nature" and a better as within the possibilities of humanity.

In somewhat the same way it is possible to detect on the part of Prodicus a recognition, however cloudy, of man's double nature. To be sure, he externalizes it, but that is inevitable under the circumstances. What else is the point of his apologue of Hercules, already referred to? As it is reported by Xenophon the young demigod is represented as turning alternate ears to the importunities of Kakia and Arete, vice and virtue, who incite him, the one to a life of indulgence and pleasure and sloth, the other to a career of toil and labor and usefulness. And while he fails in this the sole version of the fable to come to a final decision, the event could hardly have been other than a foregone conclusion in the minds of those already familiar with his legendary biography. From this rather stilted and chilly fancy, which was long admired as a model of elegant invention, there emerge two ideas—both of which are totally foreign to the naturalists or naturists—whichever you prefer to call them—the reality of temptation and the efficacy of choice or "free will." To Callicles and those of like kidney the one idea would appear as inadmissible as the other. How is it possible to be misled by the infallible promptings of an impeccable nature, or what is to be preferred before her faultless perfections? Nor is it going too far, perhaps, now that we are trying to make the most of the Sophists' possessions,—to suggest that in the case of the former idea, the idea of temptation with the accompanying implication of duty that seems to haunt it, this Prodicus, the verbalist with his meticulous concern for the discrimination of synonyms, had stumbled upon a conception in advance of his age and contemporaries, even the majority of the Socratics themselves?

But this, very likely, is to be too sanguine. And I am content to rest the case for those whom I have distinguished, awkwardly enough, as conventionists, upon what is clear on the face of the evidence—particularly since Gorgias for his part has little or nothing to contribute. He does, to be sure, betray a rather queasy sense of justice—at least he is ashamed to acknowledge that rhetoric is wholly conscienceless; in defense he would shift the blame for the faults in which it is detected to those who use it improperly. But beyond this rather timid compliment to the νόμοι he hardly ventures—possibly in awe of his strident young associates Polus and Callicles, who have no hesitation in asserting that this subject is valuable just in proportion as it enables its practitioners to evade the law,

and to do as they like with impunity. In the upshot, then, the evidence for this brand of Sophistic, taken at the foot of the letter, hardly carries beyond a politic deference for fashion—that is, for official received and accepted opinion—whether re-enforced or not by legislation.³¹

There is no use in arguing. The only possible philosophy for an age without standards, “an age of ideals,” is some form or other of pragmatism. Without standards there are but two virtues—the virtue of nature and the virtue of convention. And how rickety are their foundations we have had an opportunity to see in our own instance, and in what danger they stand of collapsing into moral solipsism or protestantism: “my own mind is my own creed,” which is again but another anarchy of self.

Nevertheless it was upon some such philosophical ground that the ancient Sophists proceeded to erect their “ethics” of citizenship. No doubt to some of them such an end seemed to be the most satisfactory within the reach of human endeavor and politics, indeed to be “the good life” itself. Such was the case with Callicles. But fortunately they constituted by no means the sole party in Athens—they and those who sought to them from one motive and another—the young and ignorant and ingenuous, the dissatisfied and disaffected, those who had broken with the past and despaired of tradition and “the wisdom of the ancients,” *placita majorum*, and were desirous only of new things, the restless and disquiet and unruly, the irreligious and skeptical and unprincipled. A veritable motley, comprising, as we know, many a naïve and simple spirit like Hippocrates, son of Apollodorus, who rouses Socrates before sunrise with the inspiring news of Protagoras’ arrival in Athens—as well as many an amateur and dilettante and tuft-hunter like Callicles, who dissipates his patrimony in toadying to the intellectual snobbery of knowledge—to say nothing of such perverse and lawless resolute as Alcibiades—parasite and host, knave and dupe. To all the confessors of the modish time and flux philosophy, “the partisans of progress”—to these mobilists in particular the Sophists served as a centre and rallying point. But however they might, as no doubt they did, flatter themselves after the manner of their kind upon their advanced ideas, they had still to reckon with an obstinate and formidable mass of the citizenry, “the great beast” of the *Republic*, inert and sullen of itself but rousing to dangerous activity at the prodings of the Aristophanic or old Athenian faction. As an opposition that particular coterie had on the whole one advantage. Composed variously enough of the reactionary and conservative, the belated and backward, the timid and stupid, the pietistic and superstitious, the formalists and ob-

³¹ See for Gorgias’ attitude, the *Gorgias*; and for the conclusion of the paragraph, the *Theætetus*.

scurantists and precisians, it was solidly welded by a unanimous desire to strangle speculation in its cradle before it had done all the mischief it was capable of. Not that as a body they were themselves any more deeply religious, in spite of their professions of orthodoxy, than were many of those with whom they quarreled. And for all their solidarity they had the counterbalancing disadvantage of being on the defensive; and conscious of fighting a losing fight with their backs to the wall against the spirit of advance, they abused and hated indiscriminately those whom posterity has in the long run approved as prophets and condemned as charlatans. For the Sophists as compared with these obstructionists there is a good deal to be said; and it is only fair to take this point of view into account in appraising their apologists. For my own part I seem to see in this indiscriminate hostility an explanation of Socrates' indulgence of the dissidents and dissentients. The intemperance of the "puritans" and "fundamentalists," as we should call them in our barbarous jargon, in the confounding of him and his companions with the Sophistic profession in a general condemnation was surely enough to stir him to a measure of compunction as against a common persecution. Certainly, it was a sympathy without approval—a kind of ironic *rapprochement* as it is made to appear in the *Apology* and the *Meno*, 91c-92c; for the conjunction was at best too artificial to bear examination, as Plato's analysis showed when it came time to draw the distinction which was destined to make of the Socratic group, mainly through his own agency and in his own person, the saving remnant of humane culture and civilization.

At the time of Socrates' death in 399, however, it cannot be said that such a distinction had been satisfactorily drawn or even discerned, in spite of a generation of effort on the part of him who was undoubtedly its originator. Unquestionably the character of Socrates was exemplary of the humanistic idea at its best. But about his thought there was evidently something incomplete, a failure to follow through, such as is illustrated in the earlier dialogues of Plato, and about his expression there must have been something indecisive and equivocal, that his spiritual heirs and assigns should have come to speak in his name to such various effect, and, upsetting the balance of elements which had been harmoniously blended in his nature, should have become so widely estranged in their own persons. It may be that the fault, if his lack of didacticism was a fault, lay with his method, his dialectic—with his preference for stimulation over instruction. Or possibly his curiosity was to blame, which, willing to discuss every question under the sun, was unwilling to *trancher* any. His profession of ignorance and skepticism gave to his philosophy the appearance of a bare form—a blank cheque which his followers were free to fill in at

their own discretion—if indeed that were not just what he himself contemplated.

At all events he had hardly drunk his cup of hemlock in the prison, when his companions began to disperse in their several directions, each bearing with him his portion, as much as he was capable of carrying, large or small, of the Socratic inheritance, leaving Antisthenes and Plato to divide between them the bulk of their master's estate; for relatively insignificant as the former may now appear and actually was, to give him credit for all that can possibly be claimed for him, it is true that the two great systems of philosophy as a guide to life have ever since remained the Stoic and the Academic.

Of the principal survivors of the little band the story goes that fearful of the Athenian demos they sought a temporary asylum with Euclides at his home in Megara—Aristippus to betake himself in the fullness of time to the court of Syracuse; others to return sooner or later to Athens, where Æschines cut for a while something of a figure as a composer of "Socratic" dialogues, much admired in their day, and Antisthenes set about the not ungrateful task of indoctrinating pupils of his own with the seeds of cynicism. As for Xenophon, he had already departed on that course of adventure which in spite of its precariousness yielded him an interval of repose and recollection on his farm at Scillus in the plain of Elis. Of the remainder of the original company the greater part appear to have settled like Phædo into what is for posterity a decorous if inglorious philosophic twilight—ὁ πάντων ἀρπακτής.

That Plato was ever so far forgetful of propriety, to say nothing of his own dignity, as to embroil himself overtly with these old associates of his, who had shared his intimacy with their revered and martyred leader, is a notion too discordant in itself to be seriously considered in the absence of conclusive evidence. And yet it was quite the fashion for a while, and may be still for aught I know, to set him and his former companions by the ears on the flimsiest of pretexts or indeed, on no pretext at all. In particular there has been a disposition to sprawl Antisthenes all over the Platonic record and to use the names of Sophists, like Protagoras and even Euthydemus, as "masks" for the author of *Sathon*. But no matter what the provocation on the part of Antisthenes—and provocation was his *métier*—such a contention, in default of anything like proof, is enough to strain the elastic limits of credulity to the breaking point. Under the circumstances, then, the matter may be left, with this brief mention, to the good sense of the general reader, who, whatever his disabilities in the eyes of scholarship, has at all events no thesis to grind. Nevertheless it is hardly conceivable that Plato should have found in their

individual careers either anything like a complete way of life or a thoroughly satisfactory expression of human nature. Upon Xenophon he must have looked as pretty much of an outsider, if not an actual deserter or renegade. Notwithstanding his personal regard for Euclides he has shown again and again his impatience with the arid eristic which his friend under the influence of Zeno and the later Eleatics was grafting upon the Socratic tree of knowledge. Nor would the authorship of Æschines have been likely to impress him as much more considerable dialectically than the belletrist of Isocrates; not impossibly he had good grounds for deprecating still another Socratic travesty. While Aristippus' complaisant accommodation of Socrates' eudaemonism with the sort of hedonism for which Sicily was notorious would only have confirmed such suspicions as he may not unreasonably have formed already of the man's mind and character. As for Antisthenes, whatever respect he may have felt for the moral seriousness of him who alone can be regarded as in any sense a rival, it would have taken a stronger digestion than Plato's to stomach the crudeness and acerbity of "the strong man" of Cynicism. His intemperance, his narrow-mindedness and impatience of learning, his insolence, his un-Attic unmannerliness and rudeness and vulgarity—in a word, his thorough-going dogmatism—if I may allow myself the parody of a pun in his own manner³²—was quite enough to revolt an Athenian of the old stock, a patrician and aristocrat, albeit a philosopher, a man of taste and refinement to boot. To Plato he must have appeared, for all his sincerity, as little better than the Sophists with whom he had formerly foregathered and to whom he was indebted for his "exhibitionism," as well as for the didactic and hortatory style which was not without its admirers among the ancients. No, as illustrations of a liberal discipline none of these personages—Socratics still less than Sophists—was capable of satisfying the sense of moral reality which Plato had acquired as a result of his initiation into the counsels of his leader. At most, if we must make a merit of their influence, they were capable of provoking him by the spectacle of their shortcomings, had such an incentive been necessary, to that precision and completion of the Socratic idea upon which he was to spend the most vigorous and fruitful years of his life.

The fact is that the strength as well as the weakness of the Socratic dialectic resides in its skeptical, its essentially critical character. It is not by chance that the dialogues wherein Plato for the most part follows his master's method turn out to be so uniformly dubitative or inconclusive. They are models of inquiry and research, exercises in the eradication of error and the assaying of residues. In this respect they suffer, as criticism

³² See Diogenes Laertius, VI, 3: "βιβλιαρίου καὶ νοῦ," etc.

always must, from the defect of their qualities. Nor is it insignificant either that controversial as they necessarily are under the circumstances, they should be so heavily shotted against the Sophists and so uniformly indifferent to the Socratics. Aside from any consideration of delicacy—for is it too much to assume that Plato was sufficiently ingenious in a pinch to have found some way of attacking their principles while sparing their persons, as he seems to have done in the case of the Megarians?—aside from any such scruple, if he has neglected the one party for the other, it is for the perfectly intelligible reason that he found the latter of little or no importance in comparison with the former.³³

At all events in dismembering Socrates they had lost whatever claim they might otherwise have had to his consideration. And in spite of the tremendous influence of Stoicism, that supposititious child of Antisthenes, Plato was right; for the student of humanism the Socratic sectaries are virtually negligible. For him it was the spirit of Sophistry that was the startling and significant apparition of the age—that spirit which has risen again and again, as often as laid, to distract the minds of successive generations. Talk of the legacy of Greek science as much as we please, it had in sober truth few positive assets to bequeath. As a matter of fact it is not improbable that the Greeks would have had difficulty in understanding what we now mean by the term. It is perhaps an open question whether our physics is not to dissolve into a kind of mathematics; but if so, we may be sure that it is not Greek mathematics that will liquefy it. Nor have I overlooked the fact that our “philosophy of nature” appears to be backsliding into a pre-Aristotelian, even a pre-Timæan stage, in which matter is rapidly dematerializing into a sort of spectral ectoplasm composed of space and time and ingredience or something even more tenuous and wraithlike, comparable with the “more and less” and the “indeterminate dyad.” How apt the instance it hardly becomes me to say; but it serves to emphasize the sanity of Socrates in discounting current science and of Plato too, for as long as he remained under Socrates’ influence. But Sophistry, on the contrary, is perennial, as, I venture to think, Plato once foresaw, in contrast with the transience of science and the vagary of the Socratics. It has its roots in the human breast where it was planted, and draws its virtues and vices from that very soil. Nor is there need of further explanation why Plato, in his great moral dialogues, having once turned his back upon the “science” of nature after the example of his master, and ignoring the heresiarchs of Socraticism, addressed himself to

³³ Not improbably he felt that they were all more or less tainted with sophistry and was satisfied that in attacking the Sophists directly he was cutting at the root of the evil, and might leave the branches to fall of themselves.

the criticism of "the new morality" as instituted by the elder Sophists—its ideas on man, on nature, and on human life.

It is not unusual to speak as though there were an abrupt break between the older physical philosophy, which had reached its term for the time being with Democritus, and this newer ethical speculation with which the names of Protagoras and his fellows are inseparably connected. And it is true enough, I suppose, that the former movement had apparently suffered one of those suspensions or dubitations which we have recently been celebrating under the commercial figure of a bankruptcy. In reality, however, it was not so much an interruption as a transformation. What Democritus had done was virtually to deny objective validity to the "secondary" properties of matter,³⁴ and in so doing to call in question a phenomenal explanation of the outer and extended world, in the interest, as he believed, of a more profound and intelligible conception of reality. Now, whether the Sophists were fully conscious of the significance of their procedure or were ridden by the kind of fatality that attaches to an idea as to a curse or a blessing, it was upon these rejections, the discards of the Democritean system, that they pounced and out of which, after reshuffling them, they undertook to construct their *theory* of human nature, its proper ends and activities.

Unpalatable though the atomic theory as such may have been at the start to Democritus' countrymen—in the picturesque phrase of a historian of their philosophy, they found it too "gritty" for their taste;³⁵ still its secondary and indirect effects were of tremendous importance and justify to a great extent the respect we have been wont to pay it, notwithstanding the confusions to which our desire to assimilate it to our own conceptions has given rise. Or after all was it less Democritus' hypothesis itself that was responsible for men's gradual change of attitude, than the general charge upon contemporary thought which induced concurrently the Democritean physics and the Sophistic ethics? But this is, no doubt, to distinguish too curiously; as the first to formulate the idea Democritus deserves whatever credit belongs to it. At all events its point consisted, not in anatomizing matter, or yet in reconciling, according to the prevailing interpretation, the Parmenidean one with the Heraclitean many, but in pointing to the eventual quantification of nature. To be sure, Democritus had not the mathematics for the task; but he did make, by hook or crook, what has turned out to be the correct forecast. It remained only to develop the calculus and to add a few further quantitative hypostases, like mass, inertia, and attraction, in order to complete the metaphysics of science.

³⁴ νόμῳ χροῖν . . . ἐτεῖ δ' ἄτομα καὶ κενόν: Diels, frag. 125.

³⁵ A. W. Benn: *The Greek Philosophers*.

But meanwhile the knell of the qualitative interpretation of nature had already tolled. If substantial reality is indeed reducible in the last resort to differences of shape, size, and position solely, then all those objective conceptions of truth which have occupied so prominent a part in the history of thought are suspect and questionable. Quality and value, agreeably with the view of Democritus and the Sophists, became wholly subjective and illusory, mere counters of opinion, one as good as another. "As things seem to you," in Protagoras, "so they are to you, and as things seem to me so they are to me; and what appears to no man is not."³⁶

Granted if you like that the Sophists themselves were no great philosophers in the strict sense of the term.³⁷ None the less they had seen the writing on the wall, whose-ever the hand; and in laying claim to an ethics they were obliged to pretend as well to some sort of consistent epistemology in accordance and an ontology consistent with it, however rudimentary and inchoate its character. Not only had they a "real" or practical *Weltanschauung*, determined in part by their own interests as well as the exigencies of the "enlightenment;" but they had been, many of them, pupils or students of such systematic thinkers as Anaxagoras and Heraclitus, to say nothing of Democritus himself. In short, it is impossible to deny them the same sort of scholastic rating as we accord the majority members of our universities at the present time. Writing occasionally on physical and even mathematical subjects, they devoted themselves assiduously to the cultivation of linguistics, philology, anthropology, ethnology, archæology, and folklore, to say nothing of civics and political and social science, and of literary interpretation and appreciation. In fact, the so-called "moral sciences" revert to them. On the whole, their conception of learning is, if anything, much nearer our own popular ideas than is Plato's. While as for the normal and methodological phase of science which we are more likely to associate with metaphysics—and this is the point after all—they were quite capable, as the titles and remains of their writings show, of giving such an account of knowledge and experience in general as sufficed not merely to justify their own conceit of wisdom and to impress their contemporaries but also to leave its mark upon posterity.

As sensationalists, then, whose creed centered in the relativity of knowledge and the indetermination of reality, so far were they from breaking or interrupting the continuity of philosophic thought—which was after all as alien as themselves and as antipathetic to the genuine Athenian genius—that they were merely extending the Ionian or Milesian succes-

³⁶ *Theætetus*, 167b, 151e. Cf. H. Gomperz: *Sophistik und Rhetorik*, s. 228.

³⁷ For a rather minimizing estimate of their endowments in this particular, see H. Gomperz: *Sophistik und Rhetorik*.

sion—if I may call it for convenience by the name of its originators—into the province occupied to-day by the moral and social sciences,—the *Geisteswissenschaft!*—a movement not without its counterpart in modern times. Their psychology, dependent as it was upon bodily structure and organization, was in proper terms a derivative of physiology; their ethics reduces to a species of instinctivism as it might be determined in one way or another by custom or expediency—a sort of social tropism. Their man, though the cock of creation, was but a featherless biped with a hypertrophied brain. Indeed, they were but a step short of behaviorism and may have missed it only by the breadth of a name. In sum, their originality consisted, not in any revolutionary discovery or invention, but in the explication of a transmitted principle. Such in brief was their practical or “real” philosophy, whether worthy of the *cachet* of metaphysics or not. And it was this *Weltanschauung*, quite as much as their specialized instruction, which recommended them to those eager and unsettled young spirits who had been so recently bilked of their confidence in the demodé science of their predecessors.

In itself all this generalization was enough to arouse Plato’s disapproval, but particularly so when considered as what it not improbably was, an apology for character and conduct. Not only was there something inherently false and hypocritical in the pretension of men with such ideas to the possession of any wisdom at all, let alone that wisdom whose function it was to secure the well-being of society—the royal or kingly science as Plato called it; not only was their private practice open to suspicion—“Is it not disgraceful,” Socrates exclaims, “that men in such case should bear themselves so presumptuously!”—but their official code was no less corrupt and vicious, as exemplified in their identification of pleasure with happiness and of the public with the good life. It is on the former count that Plato attacks Polus’ glorification of doing as one likes, anticipatory of the Emersonian “whim,” contending against that promising young pupil of Gorgias’ that it is better to suffer wrong than to do it and that the offender’s sole chance of salvation is to pay the penalty and purge his soul of his guilt. On the latter count he takes issue with Callicles, the precursor of Nietzscheism, preferring the lot of the philosopher before that of the politician, the theoretic before the demagogic life, in an argument whose studied urbanity as usual rather adds to its acerbity than detracts from it.

And yet defective as the Sophists’ humanism might appear in other respects, the gravamen of offense was to be found in its upper register. What actually moved Plato to indignation, we may believe, was their contempt of the higher notes of human nature. In the same breath with

which they avowed the relativism incidental to their theory of knowledge, they proclaimed the adequacy of an organ so constituted, of an atomic and phenomenal consciousness, to all the needs and requirements, to the aspirations as well as the appetites, of man. It was of such a creature, confessedly so feeble and imperfect, that they had the impudence to make not only arbiter but the autocrat of creation, sovereign of good as of evil. "I am far from saying that no man is wise," so runs Protagoras' Apology, "but I call him wise who, changing things about, makes good to seem and be in lieu of evil."³⁸

For all their astuteness, clever as they were in the main, they failed to notice—or it troubled them not at all—that their rationalism, in asserting the self-sufficiency of the natural man at the same time that it recognized the infirmity of his faculty and confined him within the narrow partitions of a pragmatic truth, had left of human nature nothing but a mutilated and misshapen trunk. In their partiality in making man dependent for the source of his inferior being upon the promptings and insinuations of a nature no different in kind from that of the batrachian, Plato seems inclined to indulge them—such a view was not irreconcilable with his own *belief* in the duality of human nature; at least he reconsiders his sneer at the tadpole as man's rival in the art of mensuration. What he could not forgive or overlook, the unpardonable sin in his eyes, was the futility that would cut off humanity altogether from participation in a higher and nobler reality, from that spiritual endowment or portion, *θείας τινὸς καὶ ἀνύφου μοίρας*,³⁹ which he himself believed to be man's birthright, affiliating human nature in its upper reaches with the divine through communication with the *ideas* of beauty, truth, and goodness.

It is a great pity that the word *supernatural* has lost what would seem to be its native English connotation, particularly nowadays when we are in such dire need of a specific against the seductions of the subconscious. Were it otherwise, were it possible to redeem its character and restore its credit, we then might without impropriety contrast the Platonic with the Sophistic man as a supernatural creature—not wholly natural, not altogether of the earth, but in some part, however small, of a superior order—a being not wholly earthly, if not wholly spiritual. It is in this sense at all events that Plato, without denying his mortality, has no hesitation in calling him divine (*θεῖος*) as he succeeds in transcending his lowlier station. Such is the force of the similitude which informs the *Phædrus*, Plato's most eloquent profession of faith in the spirituality, as well as the duality, of human nature. There the spirit of man is likened to a charioteer endeavoring to guide a span of winged horses to his celestial goal.

³⁸ *Theætetus*, 166d.

³⁹ *Phædrus*, 230a.

Of these the one is noble and of a noble breed, well trained and amenable to the rein; the other is quite the reverse, a rebellious, unruly brute, inclining to earth and struggling, often successfully, to thwart the efforts of its mate to lift the chariot of the soul.

In effect then, as illustrated in the figure, Plato's achievement, taken up and perpetuated by the Platonic tradition, was to spiritualize the naturalistic humanism, which was, to give them their due, original with the Sophists and for which, partial as it was, posterity and Platonism too is so far forth in their debt.⁴⁰ But instead of leaving man with his harassed conscience alone in the universe with the lower animals, the beast and the brute for his best allies, the humanism of Plato promoted him to a companionship, a real though humble friendship with divinity and made him a sharer in its ends, an ally of the gods.

The procedure, if I may so speak of it, by which Plato succeeds in transforming in this manner the imperfect humanism of the Sophists and in reclaiming for man's usufruct his spiritual heritage, consists with the distinction which he draws in the *Republic* between the two minds—the one lower, and the one higher—the reason and the *nous*. The reason is clearly enough the agent of rational discourse, the instrument of abstraction and comparison and inference as exemplified in the process of ratiocination. The *nous* however is difficult of definition. On some accounts I should like to translate it *soul*. In the respect that I am now considering, in respect of man's spirituality, *soul* is perhaps the nearest English equivalent; it has the proper poetic and imaginative associations. But it is, if anything, too sentimental. In accord with the Hellenic genius, which was never obsessed by the fantastic delusion characteristic of heretical romanticism that it is possible to know with the emotions, there is about the Platonic *nous*, even in late tradition, more than a trace of intellect, of which English *soul* has been pretty well stripped by precedent, in great part, of false-Platonizing poets like Shelley and Wordsworth.⁴¹ I might, then, if I were confined to a single expression, compromise the matter by calling *nous*, in despite of paradox, the intellectual spirit. In any case it is the organ of spiritual divination or intuition, the faculty apprehensive of ultimate truth or reality.⁴²

⁴⁰ I still speak, it will be noticed, of Plato's dualism in spite of the tripartite analysis of the soul in the *Republic*. But this partition notwithstanding, human nature is even there viewed as in division between the νοῦς and the τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν, the θυμός taking sides with one or the other according to circumstances.

⁴¹ While Dean Inge, for instance, in his *Philosophy of Plotinus* renders *nous* by *spirit*, Professor Bréhier in his edition and translation of the same author calls it *l'intelligence* and Mr. McKenna in his translation of the *Enneads* employs *intellectual principle*.

⁴² It is the means by which we apperceive—if I may try to bring another term to its right senses—the ideal forms, which become in this way spiritual presentations.

So Plato refers to it as an ὄψις or θέα, a vision or insight; though—again we must guard against the ambiguities of our English vocabulary—so far from being visionary in the sense of deceptive or passive, it is the power which enables us to communicate with the great impersonal *ideas*, significantly that of beauty as well as of truth and justice; and which (to adopt a later and Stoic phrase) presides over the hegemony of man, maintaining the order and balance of his members—an activity that while intellectual and moral is no less spiritual—for we have to remember that Plato's beauty is but the lowest rung of the ladder, and that his virtue is a wisdom, not an emotion, however much they, as truth also, may be irradiated by love.⁴³

Doubtless, it is and always has been the problem of humanism to find some way of living satisfactorily in this world. It is difficult, if not impossible, to look upon a life of unhappiness otherwise than in some sort a failure. Nor with Plato is happiness less than a prime consideration. But then satisfaction and happiness are conditioned, to say the least, fully as much by the nature of man as by the nature of the world. How little they depend, in Plato's opinion, on worldly circumstance alone, is made clear at the beginning of the *Republic*, when he accepts the challenge of Glauco and Adeimantus to show that the good man in utter destitution is in better case than the wicked in prosperity and repute.

"Ein guter Mensch in seinem dunkeln Drange
Ist sich des rechten Weges wohl bewusst."

In the course of this dialogue undertaken with such a purpose he proceeds to develop realistically what he considers the genuine humanism together with the kind of society in which alone the genuine humanism after his kind can flourish and short of which it must remain a private accomplishment of the individual. That there is a great deal in the *Republic* to shock and offend modern sensibilities—and those of the Greeks too for that matter—it would be idle to deny. Even Plato seems finally to have despaired of the socialization of humanism and resigned himself to its isolation in natures of distinction.⁴⁴

Nor is man's destiny without bearing upon the problem of satisfactory living either. And that man has a future no less than a past Plato firmly believes. About the exact character of that future he is not certain; in speaking about it he invariably had recourse to myth. But certain he is that it depends upon the manner in which man lives his present life and on the degree to which he has cultivated what I have ventured to call his intellectual soul.

⁴³ To discuss Platonic love at this point would take me too far afield. Suffice it to say that it was a passion largely intellectual and spiritual even in its concrete manifestations, as Alcibiades' tribute at the close of the *Symposium* amply attests.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Theatetus*, 172d-177c.

Παραδειγμάτων, ὃ φίλε, ἐν τῷ ὄντι ἐσώτων, τοῦ μὲν θείου
εὐδαιμονεστάτου, τοῦ δὲ ἀθέου ἀθλιωτάτου.⁴⁵

So much he takes as assured. And those who speak otherwise speak after the manner of the Sophists. No man can be happy in defiance of his higher nature or save in conformity with the peculiar virtue of human kind. And that nature, that virtue is discovered, not by the flickering reflections of sense or the capricious suggestions of impulse and instinct, not even by the tentative gropings of reason—but by the immediate revelation of the great immutable ideas to the soul.

⁴⁵ *Theaetetus*, 176e. Cf. the whole passage. I cannot translate the quotation. Professor Fowler translates for the Loeb Library as follows:—"Two patterns, my friend, are set up in the world, the divine, which is most blessed, and the godless, which is most wretched." This is very well; only we must bethink ourselves that *divine* and *godly* and *blessed* have not the same connotations in Plato as they have for us. There has been so much Platonism assimilated by Christianity that in reading Plato we are disposed to view him inversely in the mirror of our own religion. Perhaps *godlike* will come nearer his meaning than *divine*, which is in many instances nearly synonymous with *spiritual*, while *blessed* should be freed of its peculiar theological suggestion.

V

PLATO'S POLITICAL IDEAS

If we seek a rallying point, to begin with, for Plato's political conceptions, we shall find that they all centre about a single idea—the idea of justice. No other problem has given rise to more discussion, I suppose, than just this problem of the relation of justice to society and the individuals composing it; and in no age, perhaps, has it given rise to more discussion than it did in the age of Plato. The difficulty has to do partly with the nature of justice itself and partly with the discovery of a practical working definition. Abstractly it is easy enough to explain that justice consists in giving everyone exactly what he deserves. But who in any conceivable state of society is able to determine exactly what any one deserves—least of all he himself; and how is it possible to make sure that he gets it, neither more nor less? It is bad enough to administer the approximate, the rough and ready justice of the courts of law without undertaking to settle such questions as these with the fallible judgment at our disposal. And in default of the competence and method necessary to such an adjustment society has been obliged to muddle along as best it might, allowing the individual, within certain limits, to take what he can get, under the dubious pretence of legality, without considering too closely whether he deserves it or not, in accordance with the good old plan,

“That they should take who have the power
And they should keep who can.”

Under these circumstances there has gradually grown up a kind of discrepancy between men's professions and their practices, between the sort of thing that they talk in public and the sort of thing that they confess only to themselves or acknowledge only by their actions. On the one hand they pretend to be animated, both as individuals and as citizens, by a single and unique preoccupation with justice, upon which they assert their community and government are founded. On the other hand they seek their own advantage by any means in their power, regardless of their neighbours or of any particular standard of right and wrong. Eulogising virtue and honesty with their lips, they recognize in their hearts that nine times out of ten such scruples are merely side-issues, that the main aim is success, and that success is not to the good, the virtuous, and the honest, but to the strong, the audacious, and the adroit. It is the latter sort of man who gets on in the world; he is honored, flattered, respected without concern for his merits. He enjoys the esteem of the public, he unites their votes, he holds their offices, he rewards his friends and pun-

ishes his enemies. And what is more, he carries his point, he controls the administration of what he and every one else calls justice, he influences legislation and law in his own sense. In short, right becomes merely his convenience, the convenience of the powerful. And in the meanwhile we go on, in our fatuity, calling the convenience of the unjust justice and speaking as though justice were the foundation of our polity, when in reality its foundation is force or fraud in one form or another. Why not come out with it, then, flat-footed? Is anybody the dupe of our hypocrisy? Why not say that it is the smooth appearance, the plausible pretence that we have in mind when we educate our children in the shams of honesty and virtue? Why not acknowledge that it is a mask for their actions with which we are providing them? that we are teaching them a vocabulary with which to impose upon the simple and credulous who accept phrases, like specie, at their face value? Why not confess among ourselves that our little speeches about justice are for business and politics, a mere diplomacy of language; but that for the practical affairs of life our incentives are success and self-advancement? In other words, why not define justice as the advantage of the reigning interests whatever they may happen to be at the time?

Modern as all these notions seem, though cloaked as a general thing with a decent reticence, they are all, as a matter of fact, to be found in Plato. They are to be found in the mouth of Thrasymachus in the *Republic*; they are to be found in the mouths of the Sophists, of Callicles and Protagoras and Gorgias, the rationalists and utilitarians of the time, with whom they were as favourite doctrines as with Nietzsche. Indeed, the young men of Plato are full of the futility of virtue and honesty and justice, of the expediency of wickedness and the high hand, of the natural rights of the strong and the dexterous over the weak and the simple, of the excellence of success and the legitimacy of any means by which it may be attained.

It is against these thinkers that Plato undertakes to vindicate the desirability of a genuine and absolute justice, and it is in opposition to their notions of government that he attempts to rear an ideal republic upon the corner stone which they have rejected as unfit for the purpose. And what concerns him most, to begin with, is less justice as a foundation of government than justice as a foundation of character. At the outset it is the individual to whom his gaze is directed and not the community. In one sense his *Republic* is less interesting as a plan of society than as a kind of symbol of the human spirit. It is the inner city, the city of the soul, the spiritual city, upon which he has his mind's eye; and he constructs his ideal polity for the sake of comparison. The justice which it

is so difficult to study in the small letters of the individual, he hopes to read to better advantage in the capital letters of the city. For after all the just man and the just city are counterparts one of the other, and what is justice in the individual is justice also in the community, or contrariwise.

With this idea in mind, then, his first care is to re-establish the cause of justice and virtue as the basis of human character. And to do so he proceeds to argue that man is happy just because he is virtuous. To declare that virtue insures success and that honesty is the best policy is absurd and mischievous. The upright man may be successful or not—it makes no difference; in any case he can dispense with success, his satisfaction is in his own merit. Strip him of the goods of existence; refuse him the respect due to his qualities; worse than that, let him have the reputation of an evil doer; and last of all, let his righteousness escape the approval of the gods themselves—even then, as compared with the wicked flourishing in prosperity, surrounded with admiring followers and flatterers, and blest in spite of reality with the name and character of virtue; even then, says Plato, will the just man be happy and the unjust wretched. Yes, it is better to suffer injustice than to commit it. And if the wicked understood his own best interest, he ought to desire nothing so much as to be brought to justice, to expiate his misdeeds, and by so doing regain his innocence.

But this justice which forms the basis of character and which, properly understood, insures the only genuine happiness, what is it? Who is the just man? It must be confessed that Plato's definition strikes the modern as rather peculiar, mainly, I think, because it lays no particular stress upon the rewards accruing. At the same time it seems to me that it has one advantage over other definitions in being the only one which furnishes in any sense a working formula for the regulation and adjustment of human affairs. And it does so by indicating the conditions under which alone justice can work itself out. It indicates as nearly as can be done, I fancy, the manner in which some sort of relative justice can be attained. It has its difficulties too, but as a definition it has this advantage.

Justice, then, in the individual consists in a kind of balance or equilibrium among the faculties by virtue of which each is enabled to do its proper work and to contribute in its proper degree to the welfare of the entire being. In other words, justice is defined by its obligations rather than by its privileges, one reason evidently why the definition is bound to be distasteful to us nowadays. In Plato's mind there existed a sort of hierarchy among the faculties. At the top stood the mind, the νοῦς, perhaps what the Germans call *Vernunft*; at the bottom lay the appetites and passions; and midway between was situated the courage or mettle, the

kind of thing we think of when we speak of a man of spirit, the nearest thing in Plato's psychology to the will. In the just man the mind or reason should rule. And by mind or reason Plato understood not merely the discursive or syllogistic reason or ratiocination but something akin as well to divination, intuition, or insight. Of the perception of higher truth he always speaks as an ὄψις or θέα, a seeing or vision. To this principle the passions and appetites are to be kept in subordination by means of the animation or courage, which in a correct balance of the faculties allies itself with the mind or νοῦς. Such is the just man; he is the man who has harmonized and ordered his spirit in this wise.

In this respect, it will be noticed, Plato stands at the antipodes from the Bergsonians, who seem in some obscure manner to divorce the intuition as an organ of truth from the reason and to associate it with the instincts, so making of it a servant or confederate of the third estate. In this interpretation the mind is left in isolation with no direct and instant perception of reality, while the sole reality immediately appreciable becomes that of the desires and impulses—a sense of eternal mobility and flux, in which the foundations of character are submerged and finally swept away, and truth itself loses all stability and degenerates into an exclusive regard for the many as the sole reliable data of consciousness.

Now it is in just the contrary sense, for the sake of making his idea of the hegemony of reason clearer, that Plato undertakes to construct an ideal polity, where it will be easier to recognize the qualities of justice in accordance with his conception of the parallelism between individual and state. To take this structure of Plato's quite literally, as has been done so often, would be to make a grave mistake and to prove oneself more of a Platonist than Plato himself. As a matter of fact Plato is not wholly serious about his republic. He is led to introduce the subject in the first place as an illustration of his general theory of justice. Such, he says, would be the perfect state, where justice may be studied to the best advantage. Once embarked, however, he becomes interested in the undertaking for its own sake and dwells complacently upon its details; occasionally he is quite carried away by it. But on the whole, the plan itself remains a *jeu d'esprit*, a play of the imagination, which he never expects or hopes to see realised in anything like the shape in which he proposes it, as is evident from a comparison with his *Laws*. It is, then, a species of allegory or parable—or better, perhaps, a metaphor; it is seriously meant, not as a practical project, but as an illustration of Plato's general ideas of government, and it is full of penetrating *aperçus* with regard to human nature and society.

Ideally, then, such a city as he proposes as a paradigm of the just man, is composed of three definite and distinct classes or orders analogous to the three faculties of the individual. At the bottom there are the workers of all kinds—tillers of the soil, labourers, handicraftsmen, merchants—all who contribute to the support of the community. Just above are the warriors, the protectors and guardians of the commonwealth, answering to the courageous or spirited principle in man. From the latter are chosen the rulers, who in the perfect city are philosophers prepared for their work by a long and arduous discipline and selected by successive eliminations from the mass of the warriors. As philosophers they are naturally unwilling to undertake the task of government and are moved to do so only by a sense of their responsibilities as the sole members of the city competent for the business. They descend into politics as a man who had been used to the light of day would descend into a den or cavern. But then, no man who wishes to rule is fit, in Plato's opinion, to do so.

In a state so constituted justice will consist, as before, in a balance or equilibrium of forces under the direction of these philosopher-rulers, who make up the *voûç* or mind of the community. They will be assisted in their labours by the class of warriors or guardians, who, like the courageous part of the individual, are intrusted with the preservation of order as well from sedition within as from hostility without. Of the workmen Plato has little to say; they fail to interest him particularly as long as they do their work in subservience to their superiors and provide for the subsistence of themselves and others. At the same time it would be a mistake to suppose that he contemplates their condition as one of serfdom or slavery, though to such a condition he has no great objection in the abstract. In this instance, however, his city exists as a whole for the benefit of its inhabitants—or rather, it would express his meaning better to say that the inhabitants exist for the benefit of the city. It is not for the sake of the well-being of such and such a person, he declares, that the state exists, but for the well-being of the whole. In this way the working class has its share of the advantages resulting from the organization—a share proportionate to its abilities and importance. As in the case of the purely physical principle in the individual, however, its predominance over the other orders would mean confusion and disaster. It has neither the wisdom of the lawgiver nor the mettle of the warrior. It is, therefore, as though Plato took it for granted or assumed it rather than despised it. As its functions are perfectly familiar already, he sees no need to dwell upon them.

Of the warriors, on the contrary, he has much to say that is curious and interesting. In this connection it must be remembered that the rulers are originally members of this class, being selected from it in accordance

with certain standards so that up to a given point the conditions of both are alike. It is evident that these two classes taken together form an aristocracy; there is no doubt about it, they are the superiors of the third estate in every respect. Distinction of classes is a postulate of the system; it is a part of the conception of justice, for without distinction justice becomes unthinkable and the acme of injustice resides in the socialistic conception of an equal participation by unequal participants. And this distinction he purposes further to strengthen by means of a gross convention such as necessarily underlies every government, whether it happens to be that of the divine right of kings or that of the divinity of the people's voice and the sacredness of the will of the majority. Pure convention in either case and equally preposterous on examination. But so it is and so it is indispensable. And in like manner Plato proposes the necessary convention at the root of his polity. We will teach the people, he advises, that while they are all of the earth and brothers, yet they are made of different materials—some of gold and some of silver and some of bronze; and the nobler the metal, the nobler the creature. This is pretty gross, to be sure—pretty nearly as gross as the infallibility of majorities; not quite, perhaps, but still gross enough in all conscience—and yet admirably adapted to the purpose—to safeguard the distinction and hierarchy of the several classes and orders. At the same time its crudity was tempered in practice by the circumstance that Plato provided for a rectification of the errors of birth. If a gold or silver child should be born in the brazen class, he was promptly to be promoted as soon as he manifested his quality; on the other hand, if a bronze child should be born of gold or silver parents, he was liable to degradation in like manner.

Though an aristocracy, then, in the most distinctive sense, the two upper classes were an aristocracy of merit. As a result they were not simply an aristocracy of privilege but an aristocracy of responsibility. They were carefully educated and trained; their life was a severe and strenuous drill in the form of a rigid communism. They had no right to property of any kind save their clothes and their arms. They were without homes; the houses in which they lived, when they lived in houses rather than in camp, were not their own. They received their support from the community. They ate in messes. They had their wives and their children in common. Their marriages were temporary; and the offspring of their transient unions were taken possession of by the state and cared for in public nurseries. No man was supposed to be able to recognise his own child or identify it. Woman, as having the same faculties as man only weaker, was to bear her part in the same affairs and occupations. Like him she was to exercise in the palæstra; like him she was to bear arms

and fight the battles of her country; like him she was to eat in her mess and live homeless and free of permanent ties save her duty to the state and society.

By such ways and by such means did Plato dream of founding and preserving an efficient and uncorrupted aristocracy. Shocking as some of these notions are to the modern consciousness, there is still something to be said for them in theory if not in practice. It was in some such manner that the monastic orders were managed; and no more powerful and effective organizations ever existed. But then they were pledged to chastity as well as to poverty; and there are but two ways to be chaste—either to have no wife or to have only one, of which the former is doubtless the better if it were not for the difficulty of perpetuating the caste. At the same time it must be acknowledged that Plato has recognized one important truth: that an aristocracy, to be worthy of the name, must be free from individual self-seeking and from the distracting influence of feminine frivolity. Let the order be as wealthy as you please—the wealthier, the better as an order; but see that its members remain unmoved by hopes of personal enrichment, if they are to devote themselves heart and soul to the furtherance of the object for which their body as a whole exists. And see too that they are removed from the insinuations of the sex with its vanities and caprices and irrelevances, if they are to amount to anything as public officials. Even as it is, there is nothing more egotistic than the father of a family, who is obliged to prefer the welfare of his wife and children before that of his neighbors; there is nothing more disheartening in the pursuit of a disinterested aim than the reproaches of a family which imagines its own interests to be neglected and is piqued at the prosperity of acquaintances and associates. Even at the present day there is nothing more exigent than the claims of a family. How much greater must have been its distractions at the time of Plato, when wives were ignorant as well as idle and luxurious! Consider the confusion introduced into Socrates' final interview with his friends by the irruption of Xanthippe. All this Plato saw; he had probably some knowledge of Xanthippe himself and the kind of home she made for her husband. And against this sort of thing he tried to provide by breaking up the home in the interests of disinterestedness and by abrogating the importunities of wife and children at the same time that he removed the children from the timid and selfish instruction of their parents. And for his day, too, he would have accomplished not a little in giving woman something to do, in supplying her with a mission, or to employ the modern cant, in making her an instrument of social service. But after all, he reckoned without his host; he failed to count with human nature, and he proposes as a

remedy for human weakness what is bound to seem to the average man something little short of a monstrosity.

But after all, in this vision of things as they might be one must not take Plato too seriously. Nobody was ever more conscious of the difficulties and paradoxes of his plan than he himself. Even in his own eyes it is hardly more than a castle in the air, to which he attaches only a relative importance save in as far as it helps him to realize his idea and principle of justice. Evidently in such a city as this, where everything is properly disposed and where every man is in the right place, justice will consist in every one's minding his own business. The well-being of the community will depend upon every individual's and every class's doing its own work and fulfilling its own function in its proper station in life. In other words, justice in the large as in the small is simply order. This is the reason why it seems to me that Plato's definition has a certain experimental—I hesitate to say practical—value which is wanting to most definitions of justice. It specifies the actual conditions under which justice is possible; there are no nice appraisements and delicate assessments of awards and emoluments to be made. Provided every member of the community does the work for which he is fitted in the scale of his relative ability, he will automatically receive his deserts. And here is, of course, the crux of the system—the accurate direction of the citizens' proclivities; and though it is probably easier to determine what a man is fit for than what he is worth, still the former task is hard enough. And it is complicated by the not infrequent occurrence of the exceptional case, who would have fared worse under Plato's authority than he does in the present scheme of things. Such persons are not seldom of great value to society, although that value may not be capable of exact computation. Of these exceptions the hardships are often extreme; they are suited for none of the usual employments, their services to the public are seldom recognized by their contemporaries, they seem hardly to belong to the world into which they have been brought—their livelihood is as problematic as their utility. Such a character was Blake or Coleridge, to mention only poets. And yet the development of moral types of the sort is as important for civilization as the production of Rothschilds or Bismarcks. In human society, as it is actually constituted by a free play of more or less spontaneous forces working elastically to approximate results, such characters are able, as a rule, to find some kind of place and existence, even though with difficulty. But in Plato's republic with its strict suppression of individualism they would have had no footing; contributing in no wise to the support or the protection of the government of the city, falling properly into none of his classes, they could expect no other fate than repudiation and banish-

ment. Such, as a matter of fact, is the sentence to which he condemns the poets; much as he loves them personally, his polity has no room for Homer or Hesiod or Sophocles. They are but fabulists and makers of falsehood. At most they can be tolerated only as they will consent to teach useful and salutary truths; that is, as far as they cease to be variations and conform to the normal type of society.

But however this may be, whatever the difficulties and inconsistencies even of an ideal constitution, one thing is clear—Plato's conception of justice as an order or balance of forces in an individual and a community. Such has been his objective from the first, much as he may have loitered by the way attracted by the scenery along the roadside. Once he has reached this conclusion, however, he proceeds, with his conception as a criterion, to the more practical part of his work—the criticism of actual forms and types of government and the search for the best and most advantageous one possible.

Since justice consists in a delicate equilibrium of powers, in the formation of a perfect harmony out of a number of divers elements, it is evident that the task of insuring it is an exceedingly difficult and problematic one, requiring the highest kind of ability on the part of the ruler or justiciar. In fact, government is an art or a science demanding both natural aptitude and acquired skill. As such it is entirely out of the power of the crowd, which is bungling and foolish—the government of the many is a contradiction in terms; it is not a government at all but an anarchy. It boasts that it is a government of the people, by the people, for the people; and so it may be. But none the less is it a government of the masses, of quantity, not of quality. As such it means the suppression of the minority by the majority. And since merit is always in the minority, it is the government of the better by the worse. Further, as it knows itself to be inferior and to have usurped a position which does not belong to it, it rapidly develops a distrust and a hatred for any sort of distinction whatever.

Under these circumstances there are only two careers open to men of ability, who in happier conditions might become philosophers or lovers of wisdom. On the one hand they grow into demagogues; for being debarred by their talents from ruling, they can only learn to truckle to the multitude and to echo its whims and caprices, falsely pretending that these opinions constitute a system or philosophy of government—or, as we should say, a platform. In Plato's words such persons might be compared to "a man who should study the tempers and desires of a big beast . . . he would learn how to approach and handle it and at what times and from what causes it is dangerous or the reverse, and what is the

meaning of its various cries, and by what sounds it is soothed or infuriated; and . . . when by constantly waiting upon it, he has become perfect in all his lore, he calls what he has learned by the name of wisdom and makes a method or art of it . . . calling this honorable and that dishonorable, good and evil, just and unjust, all in accordance with the tastes and moods of the big beast." Or on the other hand, the man of ability who has no other opening for his activities and who is revolted by the rôle of demagogue, may engage in the single pursuit which the mob are capable of respecting; namely, the making of money. Hence the growth of a plutocracy along with every democracy. At the same time, as the accumulation of great wealth in the hands of a few tends to recruit the ranks of the needy, the rise of a plutocracy serves to reinforce the democracy which breeds it. In this way the proper balance of powers is broken up and destroyed; intelligence and courage cease to rule and the passions and appetites assume the ascendancy; intuition is degraded from the reason to the desires. In a word, justice is not the controlling principle of such a community, but license, or, as the people delight to call it, liberty.

"Is not this, indeed, a delightful state of affairs!" exclaims Plato with sardonic enthusiasm, "where a man may say and do just what he likes" and "where the individual is able to order his own life for himself just as he pleases," "where there is no necessity for you to govern . . . or to be governed, unless you like" and "where, because some law forbids you to hold office, there is no necessity . . . that you should not hold office"—"a charming form of government indeed, full of variety and disorder, and dispensing a sort of equality to equals and unequals alike." And finally, "when a democracy which is thirsting for freedom . . . has drunk too deeply of the wine of liberty, then, unless her rulers are very amenable . . . she calls them to account and punishes them"—is Plato prognosticating the recall? What she wants are "subjects who are like rulers and rulers who are like subjects; these are men after her own heart, whom she praises and honors both in private and public," until "the anarchy finds by degrees a way into private houses and ends by getting among the lower animals and infecting them." "The father grows accustomed to descending to the level of his sons and to fearing them, and the son is on a level with his father—for neither of his parents has he any respect or reverence." "The teacher fears and wheedles his pupils, and the pupils despise their masters and tutors; young and old are all alike—the young man is on an equality with the old and is ready to compete with him in word and deed; and the old men condescend to the young and are full of jocularly and pleasantry; they are loath to be thought morose and authoritative and therefore they adopt the manners of the youth." "Even

the she-dogs are as good as their mistresses; and the horses and the asses have a way of marching along with all the rights and dignities of citizens; they will jostle a body if he does not get out of their way—and all things are full to bursting with liberty.” “Above all, see how touchy the citizens themselves become; they chafe impatiently at the least hint of authority, and at last, as you know, they cease to care even for the laws; they will have no one over them.”

Such is Plato's diagnosis of democracy; and though relieved by touches of humor, it is serious enough. Whatever we may think of it, it is necessary to remember one thing. Plato is not now theorizing; he is speaking from experience; he had seen democracy distinctly and close at hand. He had never run for office, I believe; but he had relatives who had stood within its danger and he had followed the trial and condemnation of his friend and master, Socrates.

But his objections to democracy went even deeper. It was not only opposed to his principles by its disorderliness or essential injustice, its pretension to distribute a kind of equality among equals and unequals alike, its tacit denial of the fundamental facts of nature in the creation of better and worse, its confusion of higher and lower; but what was worse, it was antipathetic to his own character and disposition, which were finely aristocratic and distinguished. To such a person democracy has a way, it must be acknowledged, of making itself peculiarly detestable. Where the blame lies, I do not pretend to say—on both sides, I fancy. On the one side democracy itself has a hatred of distinction, which it makes no effort to conceal. As a matter of fact distinction is inimical to its existence. For that reason it likes to see pretenders to its favors on all fours at its feet. But at the same time it can not be denied that the man of distinction frequently displays a superciliousness with respect to the masses which is as galling as it is in one sense undeserved. Every man is respectable as a human being whatever he may be as a constituent of the mob. It is worth noticing that Shakespeare, who speaks so slightly of the populace as such, modulates his voice when he addresses its individual members and treats even his fools with a kind of human sympathy. But, at all events, that Plato detested his democracy as well as disapproved of it, seems pretty certain. He detested its vulgarity, its cant, its rough and ready judgment, its self-complacency; and he held himself aloof from it by prejudice, perhaps, as much as by principle. Nor were the conditions of demoralization under which he beheld it such as to elicit a favorable criticism even from a more unprejudiced observer. Nevertheless, with all allowance made for the circumstances, there is still something in what he says to make the thoughtful pause before pushing to an extreme a form of government which is so particularly

liable to extremity and whose virtue consists so largely in moderation. Other governments are likely to fall by deficiency of their own principle, democracy alone by its excess.

At the opposite pole from the democratic type of government is the monarchical. With Plato's sympathies and ideas it is not surprising that he should more incline to the latter than the former terminal, although he can not approve of it unreservedly. Nevertheless, in the actual state of things, of all systems that seem to be possible he appears to believe that the best chance of securing something like justice is by the instrumentality of a benevolent despot—a single arbitrary ruler of good parts and disposition, neither weak nor violent, uniting in his own person the three attributes of the perfect governor—wisdom, courage, and steadiness. Such a character would appear to be the best equipped for weaving a harmonious design from the diverse elements of society; above all he would seem to have the best opportunity of carrying out a consistent policy. In this characterization may possibly be detected a regret for Dionysius of Syracuse, of whom he had hoped so much and in whom he had been so bitterly disappointed. At all events, as he acknowledges, the happy conjunction of circumstances necessary to unite these qualities in a single individual and to bring this individual into power is so rare as to be wellnigh miraculous. And in default of such a ruler he declares for a kind of limited or constitutional monarchy, whose master is restrained and controlled by law. As for the other forms of government by the few as opposed to the many—namely, oligarchy and tyranny—he has for them no toleration of any kind whatever.

In following Plato's discussion, as I have tried to do, with an eye to what seems most pertinent to our particular occasions, I have implicitly taken account of the most important tenets of his political creed as far as they have any modern interest or significance. It remains to indicate what is positive rather than negative in his conception. In the first place, that his theory of government is aristocratic, is perfectly clear. The two systems that he reprobates the most severely are democracy and plutocracy. The symbolic or metaphoric republic that he constructs for the purpose of illustrating the city of the soul, is ruled over by an aristocracy and an aristocracy pretty much unhampered by laws except of its own making. The will of the aristocracy is the law. And not only is it a government by an aristocracy which is the desideratum but a government for the aristocracy. The purpose and *raison d'être* of a state is to be sought not in mediocrity but in excellence. It is not by its average that a nation is justified but by its genius. And to the production and preservation of genius should its efforts be directed. Not that the remainder of society

is non-essential and negligible, but it takes its value from above; and the cultivation of an industrial community merely for its own sake would have struck him as absurd as the attempt to develop a stomach independent of the body.

As far as these conclusions are a matter of terms, an affair of logic pure and simple, it is difficult to see that Plato is very far wrong in them. That the best are alone the natural rulers of a state and that the ruling should be done in the interests of the best is so obvious on statement that it has taken any amount of sophistication and any number of centuries to make it appear otherwise. Even then the contrary opinion has succeeded in gaining a footing only by means of an indoctrinated convention as gross as Plato's parable of the gold, the silver, and the bronze men—a convention so at odds with the facts that its falsity is patent to the most superficial. That convention consists in the denial of the aristocratic principle—in the denial, that is, of any such natural distinction as better and worse. Or positively, it consists in the assertion of the romantic doctrine of equality—a doctrine that we are obliged to deny in deed a dozen or more times a day. In fact, so contrary is it to our actual convictions that even the candidate for office is revolted when he is compelled to act consistently in accord with it and to abase himself to the level of those whom for the occasion he delicately designates as his equals. Nor is such a distinction between better and worse a practical impossibility. For the rough and ready purposes of government it is easy enough to make a partition of the kind. Education, property, nativity, even sex constitute tests sufficient for practical politics.

And yet, as usual in human affairs, there is in reality one obstacle in the way of applying the theory. The world is full of people who have come into it more or less accidentally and unintentionally. As they are here by no fault of their own and in fact would gladly be almost anywhere else if they could, and as in the gaiety of their hearts they will in all probability proceed to bring others like them into a place to which they find themselves so admirably adapted; the theoretical legislator like Plato finds himself at any given time with a collection of odds and ends on his hands, which it is extremely difficult to dispose of. To be sure, there may be no great harm in this folk. To adapt Plato's own figure, they are like the amiable but incapable owner of a vessel, who is a little hard of hearing and short of sight, and is indifferently acquainted with navigation, and who is coaxed and bullied by various members of the crew who hope to get the job of pilot. At the same time it is just this sort of gentry that complicates the legislator's problem. Theoretically Plato begins by making a clean sweep of them. He dumps the rubbish somewhere

outside of his boundaries and retains only such material as suits his own designs. But the solution seems hardly practicable at present, particularly since we in America have been pursuing the opposite policy. And under the circumstances it is this matter which destroys the regularity and symmetry of many a very pretty social theory. It is itself one of the forces or factors which go to shape the final result as it exists in fact and nature. It is a part of the destiny of nations. In short, if you have a population of a certain type, what else can you make of it than the kind of thing it lends itself to? At the same time, to rescue as much of Plato's aristocracy as is feasible, it is worth while trying to make the best of your materials.

In the second place, innovator as Plato seems at first sight, it is clear, on second thought, that he is all for conservatism, as for aristocracy. Perhaps the two ideas are in reality correlatives. At all events, once his ideal republic established, he would preserve it, if possible, in much the same shape forever. Indeed, rigidity is of its very essence. As its partitions are inflexible and inelastic, allowing only for a few sorts of vocation; so in itself it forms a more or less motionless and inalterable structure, incapable of any great modification or adaptation. For the cultivation of that wide variety of individual character which we esteem one of the merits of civilization, it had no care. In its essence it was thoroughly socialistic—a kind of higher organism in which the citizen had pretty well lost his personality. Like modern socialism it guaranteed his existence at the cost of his liberty. Further, as the best state conceivable, there naturally remained nothing more to do for it except to conserve it in accordance with the principles laid down for its institution.

On the whole, this seems to me one of the instances in which Plato is carried away by his project; and, as so often happens in such cases, it is necessary to go a little deeper to get the steady bearing of his thought. Obviously enough the motive that moves him in this particular instance is a care for the permanency of political institutions. And in this respect he agrees with Burke. He recognizes as true what is too patent to be insisted upon—that the life of a nation is a slow development, that its present rests upon its past, and that any change should be made slowly and carefully in the direction of its growth. He sees that a state which breaks with its tradition is adrift and that innovation is especially dangerous in a matter of government, whose adjustments are so delicate and complicated as frequently to escape the scrutiny of a single lawgiver or even of an entire generation.

"All other errors but disturb a state,
But innovation is the blow of fate."

Not that he denies the value of a legislator who is thoroughly advised; such a person with the adaptability to meet any emergency with intelligence, is better than any set of mechanical laws or provisions that can be devised in advance. But with the difficulty of obtaining such a director at any given time before his eyes—a difficulty that amounts to a virtual impossibility—he recommends a prudential respect for antiquity and tradition.

In the third place and finally, Plato's ideas are as moral as they are aristocratic and conservative. The model of the just city is the just man. And as the just man exists for virtue, as he finds his happiness and good in virtue alone, so the just community exists for the same end and prospers accordingly. That Plato overworks the similitude between the two cases, must be granted. The main purpose, the higher justification of the *Republic* resides in demonstrating that the happiness of the just is the sole real and permanent good. The institution of the state is in one sense a side issue, undertaken for that purpose. Hence Plato is continually forcing the analogy. But in any case his constant insistence upon the necessity of virtue as a part of the very being of government, may at least lead us to ask whether the modern divorce between morality and public policy is altogether justified, whether it is not in some sense parallel with the attempt to separate morality from literature and art. That our civil government might be a little healthier for an infiltration of morality, I suppose, no one will dispute. And that international affairs should be conducted with some eye to moral considerations, would not be entirely out of the way either. And yet this is not just the point. By considering government from this point of view, Plato, like Burke at a much later day, was saved from making of politics a mere technology removed from other concerns and artificially isolated as a wholly independent and self-sufficient study like physics or dynamics. On the contrary, he was able by this means to keep in constant touch with human nature. In consequence he succeeded in reducing some of the eternal principles of the subject to their very root in the moral consciousness. And as a result, while many of his shifts and expedients seem little better than ridiculous, his general discussion has always commanded the attention and respect of statesmen of all nationalities and all ages.