XII

PLATO'S TOTALITARIANISM[1]

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Though the topic of this paper was originally suggested by Popper's attack on Plato in *The Open Society and its Enemies*, my main concern is not to take sides in the great debate prompted by that celebrated critique. My aim, rather, is expository. I shall first attempt to distinguish three principal varieties of totalitarianism and then try to see how close the fit is between any of those varieties and the political theory of the *Republic*, which is the Platonic text with which I shall be mainly concerned.

Totalitarian states are characterized by a coincidence of two features, authoritarianism and ideology.[2] By authoritarianism I understand a system in which the ordinary citizen has no significant share, either direct or indirect, in the making of political decisions. Ancient tyrannies and some modern colonial regimes are or were authoritarian in this sense. But a typical tyranny was not totalitarian, since another necessary condition, viz. ideology, was lacking. By an ideology I understand a pervasive scheme of values, intentionally promulgated by some person or persons and promoted by institutional means in order to direct all or the most significant aspects of public and private life towards the attainment of the goals dictated by those values.[3] Ancient tyrannies had, as far as our evidence suggests, no ideology; the principal aim of the tyrant was to preserve power

[1] Reprinted with permission from *Polis*, 5 (1986), 4–29, and the author.

This is a revised version of a paper read at the 1984 meeting of the Society for Greek Political Thought, held at the London School of Economics. (The coincidence of date and venue irresistibly suggested the topic.) I am grateful to all who took part in the discussion, especially to Julius Tomin, whose personal experience reminds us that the importance of the subject is not confined to the theoretical sphere.

[2] I do not purport to offer a precise definition of totalitarianism, but merely to give a characterization of the phenomenon sufficient for the purpose of this paper. For discussion of the question whether a definition is possible, of the marks by which totalitarian regimes may be recognized, and much else of interest beyond the scope of this enquiry, see Leonard Schapiro, *Totalitarianism* (London: Macmillan, 1972).

[3] 'The Fascist conception of the state is all-embracing, and outside of the state no human or spiritual values can exist, let alone be desirable' (Mussolini, article on Fascism in *Enciclopedia italiana*, quoted by Schapiro, *Totalitarianism*, 49).

and status for himself and his family and dependants, and while, as in the Sicilian tyrannies of the fifth century BC, public resources were devoted to the maintenance of that end by such means as building of temples and participation in athletic festivals, there is no indication that tyrannical governments attempted to direct private life for public ends.[4] The clearest example of an ancient Greek state which did have an ideology was Sparta, which, interestingly enough, was not authoritarian on my definition, since its magistrates were elected and their enactments subject to some degree of control by the citizen body. (Authoritarianism is, of course, a matter of degree, but I shall not attempt to pursue that question in this paper.) A state may be authoritarian and have an ideology without being totalitarian, if the locus of political power is distinct from the organization which directs the ideology, as in medieval Western Europe, where authoritarian monarchies coexisted, often uneasily, with the ideology of the Roman Catholic Church. The identity of the locus of political power and the source of the ideology is what I mean by the 'coincidence' of authoritarianism and ideology; coincidence is therefore to be distinguished from mere coexistence.

It can hardly be disputed that by these criteria the ideal state of the *Republic* is a totalitarian state. It is, of course, an instance of extreme authoritarianism. All political decisions are made by the guardians without any reference to the citizen body. The guardians, moreover, are neither elected nor removable from office by popular vote. Politically, their power is absolute; the only control over them is itself ideological, in that they are under an absolute moral obligation not to allow any deviation from the system of education by which the ruling ideology, and therefore acceptance by all of the political system, is passed on from one generation to the next (424b). That the ideal state has an all-pervasive ideology is also indisputable. The context just cited provides a good example: innovations in music and poetry (i.e. in education) gradually spread to affect people's character and behaviour, their personal relations, and finally laws and constitutional forms 'until in the end they overthrow everything both public and private' (424d–e). Here is a perfect example of that seamless web of aesthetics, etiquette, education, morality, and politics which is typical of an ideological society (cf. Puritan commonwealths in England and America, or the official policy of the Soviet Union). And finally the locus of political power is identical with the source of the ideology, viz. the intellect of the guardians. The knowledge of the Good which is the most precious possession of that intellect determines the content of the ideology, which in

[4] cf. A. Andrewes, *The Greek Tyrants* (London: Hutchinson, 1956).

turn provides the justification for the power which that intellect exercises via its knowledge of how the Good is to be realized.

It is, therefore, uncontroversial that the ideal state of the *Republic* is a totalitarian state. Where there is room for dispute is on the question of what kind of totalitarian state it is. The significance of that question will become apparent when we make the threefold distinction of kinds of totalitarianism mentioned at the outset. The basis of that distinction is a distinction in the values which the ruling ideology seeks to promote, and hence in the crucially important differences in the relative values assigned to the goals and well-being on the one hand of the state and on the other of the individuals who compose it.

(a) In the first kind of totalitarianism the purposes and well-being of individuals are totally subordinated to those of the state. The well-being of the state is defined in terms of such goods as power, prestige, and security, and the ideology requires that the citizens shall bend their energies to the promotion of those ends for their own sake. In so far as the promotion of individual well-being is itself an aim of the state, that is simply because, the citizens being essentially a resource to be exploited for the benefit of the state, it is prudent for the state to husband that resource, just as it is prudent for a slave-master to see that his slaves are well fed, well housed, and generally content. Orwell's Oceania is a totalitarian state of this extreme kind.[5] and Nazi Germany comes close to providing a non-fictional example, though the necessity of enlisting the loyalty of the citizen to support the regime gives Nazi propaganda a character which partly assimilates Nazism to the second form of totalitarianism.

(b) Here the aims of the state are defined as before, and are paramount as before. In terms of the ideology, however, the welfare of the individual is not a resource to be fostered as a means to, and if necessary sacrificed for, the good of the state. Rather the good of the individual is identified as his/her contribution to the good of the state. To confer the greatest benefit on an individual is to cause that individual to be in the best condition of

[5] 'The party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power. Not wealth or luxury or long life or happiness: only power, pure power. . . . We are different from all the oligarchies of the past, in that we know what we are doing. All the others, even those who resembled ourselves, were cowards and hypocrites. The German Nazis and the Russian Communists came very close to us in their methods, but they never had the courage to recognize their own motives. They pretended, perhaps they even believed, that they had seized power unwillingly and for a limited time, and that just round the corner there lay a paradise where human beings would be free and equal. We are not like that. We know that no one ever seizes power with the intention of relinquishing it. Power is not a means, it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship' (George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954), 211).

which he/she is capable. But the best condition for any individual is the condition of maximum contribution to the good of the state. Hence in requiring total commitment to the achievement of the well-being of the state the state itself *ipso facto* promotes the well-being of the individual. This form of totalitarianism may rest on a view of the individual as essentially part of an organic social unity, and therefore as an entity whose proper functioning, and hence its good condition, is defined as its contribution to the well-being of the whole.[6] The ideologies of Fascism in general and Nazism in particular present a debased version of this view, in which the individual transcends his particular limitations by identification with nation or race and achieves personal grandeur via the aggrandizement of the latter through the machinery of the state.[7] In this form of totalitarianism the welfare of the individual has intrinsic value, not merely instrumental value as in the first form. But this value, though intrinsic, is not ultimate; it is derivative from the identification of the good of the individual as his contribution to the good of the state, which is the ultimate good.

(c) In the third form of totalitarianism the priority is reversed. The function and aim of the state is simply to promote the welfare of its citizens, that welfare being defined independently in terms of such individual goods as knowledge, health, and happiness. The good condition of the state is thus defined as the state of maximum well-being for the citizens; as in (b) both individual good and the good of the state are of intrinsic value, but here the good of the individual is ultimately valuable, that of the state derivatively. This form of totalitarianism, then, is a form of paternalism. Citizens of a state of this kind are subjected to totalitarian authority for their own good; the justification for that subjection is their inability to achieve the good for themselves, whether through intellectual incapacity, individual weakness of character, or collective political ineptitude.

The distinction of these three kinds of totalitarianism is of some interest, both in the abstract and with reference to Plato. In the abstract the

[6] 'Since the state is mind objectified, it is only as one of its members that the individual himself has objectivity, genuine individuality, and an ethical life' (Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 156, quoted by Schapiro, *Totalitarianism*, 81).

[7] '[Totalitarianism] appears to make the state swallow the individual, and to absorb into authority completely the liberty that should be set against every authority that limits it . . . But one might say just the opposite; for in this conception the state is the will of the individual himself in its universal and absolute aspect, and thus the individual swallows the state, and since legitimate authority cannot extend beyond the actual will of the individual, authority is resolved completely in liberty. . . . the true absolute democracy is not that which seeks a limited state but that which sets no limit to the state that develops in the inmost heart of the individual conferring on his will the absolutely universal force of law' (Gentile, *Genesis and Structure of Society*, trans. Harris, 179, quoted by Schapiro, *Totalitarianism*, 35).

three theories rest on different metaphysical assumptions and are, therefore, open to challenge on different grounds. The paternalist theory is a humanist, teleological theory of a familiar kind; it treats recognizable, individual human goods as paramount and evaluates social institutions in terms of their efficacy and efficiency in producing them. Its dubious features are its denial of autonomy as itself a constituent of human welfare and its claim that some individuals are entitled to wield absolute political power in virtue of possessing knowledge of what is good for themselves and for others, a claim which is contestable both on the metaphysical ground that it is dubious whether such knowledge is possible and on the moral ground that, even if possible, it is doubtful whether it confers political authority. This theory can claim to be individualist in that it gives primacy to the good of individuals, though it is opposed to individualism in its denial of political freedom, self-expression, and self-determination. At the other extreme *Nineteen Eighty-Four*-style totalitarianism is anti-individualist in a much more damaging sense, viz. that it assigns to the individual only instrumental value. Moreover, its ascription of ultimate value to such features of the state as power and prestige, once the connection of such features with individual good is severed, seems totally mysterious. The individual is required to sacrifice his own interests for the sake of these things, yet without being given anything that can be recognized as a reason for doing so. This 'theory' is, then, not merely anti-individualist and anti-humanist, but ultimately anti-rational, resting on a blind worship of power and on a hidden appeal to coercion rather than reason. Theories of the second type attempt to remedy these deficiencies by the identification of the good of the individual with that of the state, but at the cost either of introducing highly questionable metaphysical assumptions about the nature of both, or of slipping into sheer intellectual dishonesty in passing off something quite distinct from the individual's interest as his 'real' or 'higher' interest.[8]

It is, therefore, crucial for critics and defenders of Plato to determine which of these kinds of theory is closest to the theory of the *Republic*. Popper's position is clear: though he does not explicitly allude to the classification sketched above, he regards Plato as a totalitarian of the first extreme kind, and the moral fervour of his polemic springs from his indignation at what he sees as Plato's basic anti-humanism. He asserts that for Plato, '*The criterion of morality is the interest of the state*' (p. 107; his italics[9]), that the interest of the state (i.e. the best state) is 'to arrest all change, by the maintenance of a rigid class division and class rule' (p. 89), and that 'the individual is nothing but a cog [sc. in the state machine]' and hence that 'ethics is nothing but the study of how to fit him into the whole' (p. 108).[10] This is not the place for a detailed discussion of Popper's attack on Plato's alleged historicism, but this much must be observed without more ado. Popper seems to attribute to Plato the absurd view that the interest of the state *consists in* its immunity from change. That that view is absurd needs no argument. It is one thing to believe that all change is for the worse; but that view, silly though it is (and it is certainly not one which Plato held, see below), at least presupposes an independently specifiable good state from the standpoint of which change can be seen as deterioration. But the view that change is as such bad because it is a process away from a prior state commits one who holds it to the view that any earlier state is better than any different later state just because it is earlier.[11]

[8] Cf. Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', sect. II, in *Four Essays on Liberty* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

[9] All quotations from Popper are from *The Open Society and its Enemies*, i, 5th rev. edn. (London: Routledge, 1966).

[10] The statement that the individual is nothing but a cog in the state machine is the antecedent of a conditional, but the context makes it clear that Popper accepts its truth. Cf. p. 98: 'it is the purpose of the individual to maintain the stability of the state'.

[11] Popper is apparently led to his view that for Plato all change is deterioration by his belief that since Forms are prior to their changeable instances all change is change from a condition of maximum resemblance to the Forms to a lesser degree of resemblance, i.e. (since Forms are paradigms of perfection) all change is deterioration. 'The perfect and good Forms or Ideas are prior to the copies, the sensible things, and they are something like primogenitors or starting points of all the changes in the world of flux. This view is used for evaluating the general trend and main direction of all changes in the world of sensible things. For if the starting point of all change is perfect and good, then change can only be a movement that leads away from the perfect and good; it must be directed towards the imperfect and the evil, towards corruption' (pp. 35–6).

This account rests on a misunderstanding of the notion of priority. Forms are prior to their instances in various ways: temporally (being eternal, they exist before any particular instance comes to be), causally (*F* things are *F* in virtue of participation in the Form of *F*), and ontologically (for most values of *F* there can be no *F* things if there is no Form of *F*, but the Form of *F* does not have to have instances). But none of these sorts of priority implies that Forms are starting-points of change; moreover, not only is there no evidence to support the latter claim, but there is conclusive evidence against it, e.g. in the doctrine of the *Phaedo* that things come to have certain properties by Forms coming to be in them (e.g. 102d–e). Things which become *F* obviously become more like the Form of *F*, not less like it as Popper's account requires.

The myth of the *Politicus* does indeed describe a cosmic process of degeneration, in which the inherent disorderliness of matter inevitably leads to a gradual loss of the order originally imposed by the *Demiourgos*, necessitating periodic divine intervention to restore the original order. This may be merely a metaphor for the permanent tension between rational order and recalcitrant matter which is a fundamental principle of Plato's cosmology. But even assuming that Plato believed in cosmic degeneration, counterbalanced by periodic divine intervention, that gives no support to Popper, since such cosmic degeneration is clearly compatible, and was recognized by Plato as being compatible, with social and political development (274c–d). See next note.

In fact it is obvious that Plato accepted neither that absurd view nor what I have called the silly thesis of universal pessimism, viz. that by some prior criterion of value all change is deterioration. To take the most obvious case, the freeing of the prisoners in the cave from their chains and their journey to the sunlight, while a process of change, is not a process of deterioration. Nor did he think that the course of human history is one of continuous deterioration; for example, the account of the re-creation of civilization after the flood at the beginning of *Laws* 3 is not an account of degeneration.[12] Obviously, the reason why the ideal state is to remain stable is not that stability is itself the good for a state or even a good at all, but because the ideal state is perfect (*teleōs agathēn*; 427e); hence any change must necessarily be deterioration. It is perfect in that it is so constructed as to fulfil, as well as the human condition allows, the function of the state. It is clear that Plato's insistence on the changelessness of the ideal state *admits* the claim that the function of the state is to promote the good of the citizens. Whether that was in fact his view of its function is what we have now to consider.

As a prelude to that discussion it is worth recalling some features of the structure of the *Republic* which are so familiar as perhaps to escape notice. The central theme of books 2–10 is Socrates' response to the challenge of Glaucon and Adeimantus to show that *dikaiosunē* is something worth having, an intrinsic good to its possessor, independently of any good consequences which it is instrumental in producing. The suggestion that it is something good, not for the agent, but for something or someone else, is after all the thesis that it is *allotrion agathon*, which Thrasymachus had urged against Socrates and which, all parties agree at the beginning of book 2, has not been adequately refuted. Now suppose that Plato were an extreme totalitarian as Popper alleges. In that case surely his proper response to Glaucon and Adeimantus would be as follows:

> Of course justice is *not* an intrinsic good for the just individual. Justice, in the case of the individual, is simply the virtue of fitting into one's proper place in the state machine, and is good purely instrumentally, in so far as it promotes the good condition of that machine, i.e. its stable functioning. Individual justice is, then, *allotrion agathon*, the *allo* in question being the *polis* itself. But besides, and of incomparable greater value than the justice of the individual is the justice of the *polis*, that state of the *polis* in which every individual fulfils his/her proper social role, i.e. the role such that his/her filling it best preserves political stability. That form of justice is an intrinsic good for its possessor, but its possessor is the *polis*, not the individual.

[12] 'So surely . . . thousands upon thousands of states have come into being, while at least as many, in equally vast numbers, have been destroyed? Time and again each has adopted every type of political system. And sometimes small states have become bigger, and bigger ones have grown smaller; superior states have deteriorated and bad ones have improved' (676b–c, trans. T. J. Saunders, *Plato:* The Laws (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970)).

Against Popper's contention that 'According to the *Republic*, the original or primitive form of society, and at the same time, the one that resembles the Form or Idea of a state most closely, the "best state", is a kingship of the wisest and most godlike of men' (p. 39), Plato leaves open at 499c–d the question whether the ideal state ever existed in the remote past as being like the question whether it now exists in some remote part of the world, irrelevant to his present undertaking, which is to show the conditions under which it could come into being.

It will immediately be obvious how far that reply diverges from the reality of the text. First, justice for the individual is not the virtue of filling one's proper social role. Plato indeed argues that that will flow from one's possession of justice (441d12–e2), but justice itself is that inner condition of psychic harmony in which each of the principal elements of the personality performs its proper role. And that inner state is argued to be an intrinsic good for its possessor, first via the analogy with health at the end of book 4 (444a–445b), and then in the comparison of lives in book 9, where the life of psychic harmony is argued to be the only life which is fully desire-satisfying and truly pleasant. Plato, then, accepts the challenge to show that justice is constitutive of *eudaimonia* for the individual and structures the whole of the work to meet it, whereas if he were a consistent and honest totalitarian he would dismiss the challenge as based on a misconception. The question of honesty cannot be discussed independently; since our only access to Plato's intentions is via his text, it is obviously futile to suggest that he really intends to espouse extreme totalitarianism, but attempts to disguise that intention by pretending to argue that individual justice is good for the just individual. For the only evidence which could be adduced in favour of that claim is evidence that at other places in the text Plato defends extreme totalitarianism, and that that thesis is the dominant one, i.e. evidence that the passages arguing for the benefits of justice to the individual are inconsistent with the (alleged) central thesis of extreme totalitarianism.

Where, then, do we find the alleged dominant thesis maintained or argued for in the text? Despite, or perhaps because of, the emotional intensity of Popper's polemic he is remarkably short on documentation. It is an astonishing fact that chapter 6 of *The Open Society and its Enemies*, volume i, which contains the kernel of his argument, does not refer directly to a single passage of the *Republic* which even looks as if it supports extreme totalitarianism. The alleged total subjection of the individual to the state is proclaimed on the basis of three passages of the *Laws*, 739c ff., 923b ff., and 942a ff. The second and third of these can quickly be set aside; in 942a ff. the principle that no one should think of acting for him- or herself without the orders of a leader is enunciated as part of a code of

military discipline, and therefore has no implication that in general the individual's good is subordinated to that of the state. In 923bff., in a passage regulating the making of wills, the legislator states that, since property belongs, not to an individual, but to a *genos* and ultimately to the *polis*, the testator cannot bequeath it at pleasure, but in such a way as best to serve the interests of *genos* and *polis*, to which those of the individual must be subordinate. This plainly allows and perhaps even suggests the contrast between the interest of all and the interest of one rather than that between the interest of the individual and the interest of the group, where the latter is conceived, as the extreme totalitarian thesis requires, as independent of the interests of the individuals composing the group. This leaves us with 739cff., where Plato, apparently referring to the ideal state of the *Republic*, praises the total communism which characterizes it, the abolition of the family and private property:

> and by every means the total abolition of what is private (*idion*) from their life, to such an extent that as far as possible even what is naturally private is in a way common, so that their eyes and ears and hands seem to see and hear and act in common, and they praise and censure in unison, all liking and disliking the same things.

This picture of the elimination of private life and private feeling is indeed forbidding, but it does nothing to support the thesis that Plato is here supporting extreme totalitarianism, for he continues (d6–e1):

> that sort of city, whether inhabited by gods or several children of gods [is such that] in living that sort of life they inhabit it *euphrainomenoi*, i.e. enjoying themselves.

Popper omits that sentence, thereby conveying the entirely false impression that in this passage Plato advocates the suppression of individuality for a collective good, when he quite plainly, though paradoxically, says that the suppression of individuality brings the pleasantest life for the individual, such a blessed life indeed that it can plausibly be compared to that of a god.[13]

In fact the strongest support for Popper's thesis in the text of the *Republic* is the well-known passage from the beginning of book 4 (420b–421c, cited by Popper in note 35 to chapter 5, but not discussed) where Socrates says that our aim in founding the ideal city is not to make any one class (*ethnos*) especially *eudaimōn*, but as far as possible to make the whole *polis*

[13] Plato twice uses the verb *euphrainesthai* to describe the reaction of a divine being to something which pleases it, once of the *Demiourgos* rejoicing in the creation of the world (*Ti.* 37c) and once of a goddess pleased by acts of worship (*Laws* 796b–c).

eudaimōn. On the extreme totalitarian interpretation *polis* must be understood as 'state', i.e. as an organization conceived as distinct from the individuals who compose it, and the aim of the founder of the ideal *polis* is to promote the well-being of that organization (conceived by Popper as its stability) in total independence from the welfare of its members. This interpretation has, I believe, been refuted by Vlastos,[14] who points out that in this passage the contrast is not between the interest of the abstract organization and that of the individuals who compose it, but between the interest of the whole *polis*, i.e. the whole community, and the sectional interest of any particular class within that community.[15] Vlastos also points out that when Socrates refers back to this passage at 519e–520a, where he is explaining why the guardians are to be required to sacrifice their personal interest in uninterrupted intellectual activity in order to spend fifteen years in government, he describes the *nomos* which requires them to do so as 'not being concerned that one particular sort (*genos*) of person shall do especially well, but contriving to bring this about in the whole *polis*, fitting the citizens together by persuasion and compulsion, making them give one another the benefit which each is capable of conferring on the community (*to koinon*)'.

This insistence that the aim of the organization of a *polis* is to ensure that the citizens co-operate for their mutual advantage, and in particular that those in possession of political power must aim to benefit those subject to them, picks up two themes stated earlier in the work. Socrates had argued against Thrasymachus that if government is a *technē*, i.e. a rationally ordered activity, its aim must be to promote the welfare of the governed (341d–342c). Of course, book 1 being an aporetic prelude to the whole work, we should be cautious about taking claims made there as definitive statements of Plato's views; but at least the onus is on someone who thinks that that view is repudiated in the later parts of the work to provide evidence of repudiation, whereas 519e–520a counts against that hypothesis. Then the organization of the primitive *polis* in book 2 is unambiguously attributed to the necessity for co-operation in satisfying first the basic need for survival and then the desire for a modicum of material goods

[14] G. Vlastos, 'The Theory of Social Justice in the *Polis* in Plato's *Republic*', in H. North (ed.), *Interpretations of Plato* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977).

[15] Ordinary Greek usage does not encourage a sharp distinction between the *polis* conceived as an abstract organization, the state, and the *polis* conceived as an organized community. Greek *poleis* were regularly referred to via the names of their peoples, as 'the Athenians', 'the Spartans', etc.; this usage is standard in the historians and in official documents (see e.g. R. Meiggs and D. Lewis, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969)). In the case of Athens we find the two forms 'the Athenians' and 'the Athenian people' (*ho dēmos tōn Athēnaiōn*, e.g. ibid., nos. 47, 52, 56).

(369b–372a).[16] The primitive *polis* is, then, an organization set up by individuals to secure for themselves a share of *eudaimonia*, understood at its most basic level as a materially tolerable life. As the work develops, this conception of *eudaimonia* is superseded by the more sophisticated conception of *eudaimonia* as psychic harmony, i.e. of the fully worthwhile life as consisting in the integration of the personality in the pursuit of the most intrinsically desirable goals. But the conception of the aim of the *polis* remains constant. The ideal as distinct from the primitive *polis* is not, indeed, instituted by its own citizens; for the unphilosophical individual, while capable of the primitive conception of *eudaimonia*, is not capable of the more sophisticated conception, since he is incapable of grasping what the highest intrinsic goods are. Hence it has to be set up externally, by an authoritarian, philosophic legislator. But his aim in setting up the ideal city is continuous with the aim of the creators of the primitive city, viz. the maximization of *eudaimonia* for the citizens.

It is clear, then, that Plato is not an extreme totalitarian, since the whole structure of his theory requires that the *polis* is an organization devised with the paramount aim of promoting individual *eudaimonia*. But that formulation raises the crucial question 'Whose *eudaimonia*?' Is the aim of the foundation of the ideal state the promotion of the *eudaimonia* of all its citizens, or only that of the guardians? If the latter, then while Plato may be humanitarian as far as the guardians (including for this purpose the auxiliaries) are concerned, he is still an extreme totalitarian as far as concerns the members of the productive class (who are by far the most numerous element in the state; 428e), since he regards them, not as individuals whose interests are to be fostered, but merely as a resource to be utilized as the promotion of the guardians' *eudaimonia* requires. The point is strongly urged by Popper: 'The workers, tradesmen, etc., do not interest him at all, they are only human cattle whose sole function is to provide for the material needs of the ruling class' (p. 47).

This accusation can be supported by the following argument. The function of the *polis* cannot be the promotion of the *eudaimonia* of all its citizens, for only the guardians, and to a lesser degree the auxiliaries, are capable of *eudaimonia*. *Eudaimonia* is constituted by psychic harmony, the integration of the personality under the control of the intellect, itself directed by knowledge of the Forms. But the members of the third class are incapable of providing that intellectual control, and are therefore

[16] This is summed up at 372a1–2 by the statement that justice and injustice are to be found in these people's treatment of each other, where the word translated 'treatment' (*chreia*) also has connotations of use and need.

incapable of true psychic harmony and hence of *eudaimonia*.[17] They are valuable, then, not for their own sake but merely instrumentally, as necessary for the functioning of the organization whose aim is the *eudaimonia* of the guardians.

A possible response would be that Plato is none the less committed to holding that the *eudaimonia* of the *polis* is constituted by the *eudaimonia* of the individual citizens by his acceptance at 435e of the general principle that the characteristics of communities are logically derivative from those of individuals, 'for they could not have come from anywhere else' (e3). Hence, it might be claimed, just as the Thracians are a warlike people just in virtue of the fact that all or most individual Thracians are warlike, so the ideal city is a *eudaimōn polis* just in virtue of the fact that all or most of its citizens are *eudaimones*. But that would be wrong; Plato does not in that passage make the absurd claim that for any predicate *F*, *F* applies to a *polis* in virtue of the application of *F* to the individuals composing the *polis*.[18] His claim is the more restricted one that the psychological typology (*eidē te kai ēthē*) which defines the classes of the ideal state, *to logistikon* etc., requires that those characteristics apply in the first instance to

[17] Vlastos argues (in 'Justice and Happiness in the *Republic*', sect. VIII, in Vlastos (ed.), *Plato*, II (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1971); repr. in Vlastos, *Platonic Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973)) that the lower classes in the ideal state have psychic harmony, and therefore *eudaimonia*, because it suffices for psychic harmony that the elements in the personality should be directed by true belief as to what is best, which the lower classes have. It is true that at 429b–c courage, which is the special virtue of the auxiliaries, is defined as the power of retaining in all circumstances the [true] belief about what is to be feared, while the *sōphrosunē* of the city consists in the agreement (*homodoxia*) of all classes on who is to rule (433c; cf. 432a, where the crucial word is 'harmony' (*sumphōnia*)). Vlastos concedes (ibid., n. 72) that true belief which is not produced by education is not seen by Plato as sufficient for psychic harmony, being described as 'brutish and slavish' at 430b. But while the auxiliaries clearly share the elementary education outlined in books 2–4, and therefore qualify for the appropriate level of true belief, there is no indication that the producers do so; that education is repeatedly described as directed to the formation of future guardians (e.g. 378c, 387c; other citations are given by W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, IV (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 455 n. 2), while those who have been trained in it are better men than 'the shoemakers, who are trained in shoemaking' (456d8–10), which implies that the producers are confined to a purely technical education (cf. G. F. Hourani, 'The Education of the Third Class in Plato's *Republic*', *Classical Quarterly*, 43 (1949)). The producers, then, can have no understanding of what goodness is or what the best life is for an individual or a community. They can be said to have true beliefs about these things only in the minimal sense that they believe (truly) that what the philosophers say about them is true, and it is hard to see how Plato's account gives them any reason to believe even that. Vlastos is in the paradoxical position of insisting that the intellect of the producers is both sufficiently developed to have genuine control over their lives, and therefore to ensure psychic harmony, and so weak as to require them to be enslaved to the guardians for their own good.

[18] On the absurdity of the general claim, see Bernard Williams, 'The Analogy of City and Soul in Plato's *Republic*', in E. N. Lee, A. P. D. Mourelatos, and R. M. Rorty (eds.), *Exegesis and Argument* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1973). [Ed.: This is Ch. X above.]

individuals; thus the spirited element in a *polis* is that element composed of predominantly spirited individuals. Plato is far from maintaining that a city's being *F* requires that all or most citizens be *F*; for any particular value of *F* it will be a matter for special investigation whether the city's being *F* is compatible with none of the citizens being *F* (as in the case of 'large' or 'beautiful'), or whether it requires that some but not necessarily all should be *F* (as with 'courageous' (429b) or 'wise' (428e)), or that all should be *F* (as with *sōphrōn* (432a)). The application of any predicate is subject to the requirement (435b) that the predicate should apply to *polis* and individual 'in virtue of the same *eidos*', i.e. that the features of an individual in virtue of which that individual is *F* should be the same as those in virtue of which an *F polis* is *F*. This applies to *eudaimōn* as to any other predicate. Now for the individual *eudaimonia* is constituted by psychic harmony; given the integration of the personality under the direction of knowledge of the Good the individual requires nothing more to make his/her life supremely worth having. By the principle of 435b1–2, therefore (the 'analogy' of meaning', as Williams calls it; ibid.), the *eudaimonia* of the *polis* is constituted by its social harmony, i.e. by the harmonious integration of its social classes under the direction of the knowledge of the Good supplied by its intellectual element, the guardians. And the difficulty remains that *that eudaimonia* appears to require that the majority of the citizens should *lack* individual *eudaimonia*. *Eudaimōn* seems to be an adjective with this special feature, that according to Plato's theory '*Polis P* is *eudaimōn*' is not merely compatible with 'Most citizens of *P* are not *eudaimones*' (as is the case with, for example, '*Polis P* is courageous'), but actually entails it.

The concept of a *eudaimōn polis* seems thus to contain a crucial ambiguity. Vlastos's reply to Popper requires that a *eudaimōn polis* is a happy community, i.e. a community all of whose members enjoy a maximally worthwhile life; he has, I believe, shown that when Plato says that the legislator's aim is *eudaimonia* for *holē hē polis*, that is what he means. But the analogy of meaning requires that the *eudaimōn polis* is the harmonious state. i.e. the maximally integrated state directed via the intellect of the guardians towards the realization of the good. And the central difficulty for Plato's theory appears to be the fact that these two conceptions of the *eudaimōn polis* are not merely distinct but incompatible. So we have the familiar paradox of the ideal state,[19] expressed in terms of *eudaimonia*; true *eudaimonia* requires an ideal individual, but a community of ideal individuals would not be an ideal community.

[19] Cf. R. Demos, 'Paradoxes in Plato's Doctrine of the Ideal State', *Classical Quarterly*, NS 7 (1957).

Plato's theory may seem to provide a ready answer to this difficulty. The conception of the harmonious state outlined above presupposes the prior conception of the good to be realized. And what is that good? Nothing other than the maximization of individual *eudaimonia*. Hence the two conceptions of the *eudaimōn polis* are not in conflict, since the function of the harmonious state is precisely to realize the happy community. To the objection that that cannot be, since the harmonious state requires the absence of *eudaimonia* in the majority of its citizens, Plato's reply is clear. The goal of the *polis* is the production of as much individual *eudaimonia* as possible. But the majority of people are not capable of *eudaimonia* on their own; since they are incapable of grasping the Good, they cannot provide for themselves that impetus towards it which is a necessary condition for psychic harmony. Left to themselves they will be a prey to their lawless lower impulses, and will therefore sink into an unco-ordinated chaos of conflicting desires. The nearest they can get to *eudaimonia* is to submit to direction by the intellect of someone else. The best state for an individual is, of course, to be able to provide this direction for himself; but failing that (as it does fail in most people's case) it is better for him to submit to another's direction towards the good than to succumb to the tyranny of his own undisciplined desires. That is to say, as Vlastos reminds us, it is better for him to be a slave to a master who has his ultimate good at heart than to be a slave to his own lower nature (590c–d). Indeed, since what everyone ultimately wants is his/her own good, the authoritarian organization of the ideal state is precisely designed to give everyone what they really want, as opposed to the satisfaction of particular desires, which frustrate the attainment of that goal (cf. *Gorgias*, argument with Polus). Hence, though Plato does not make the point explicitly in the *Republic*, the 'idealized slavery'[20] which is the condition of the producers in the ideal state is necessary for the achievement of their genuine freedom, viz. the ability to get what they really want.

The combination of Plato's metaphysics and his pessimistic moral psychology seems thus to offer a compellingly neat solution to the difficulty we have been discussing. There is an objective good for the individual, which everyone wants to achieve, but which most are incapable of achieving by their own efforts, since its achievement requires a grasp of the nature of that good of which most are incapable. Hence society must be so organized that the direction towards that good is provided by a ruling élite with the power to direct themselves and others towards the good which they alone grasp. The *eudaimōn polis* is thus the perfectly organized

[20] Vlastos, 'The Theory of Social Justice in the *Polis* in Plato's *Republic*', 28.

polis, and the criterion of its perfect organization is its realizing, to the maximum extent possible, given the ineliminable fallibility of human nature, each individual's potential for personal *eudaimonia*. Hence Plato's theory, while admittedly totalitarian, is straightforwardly paternalistic, thereby absolving him from the charge of anti-humanitarianism, which is at the heart of Popper's attack.

As an account of Plato's intentions this seems to me right, but I think that the solution it offers is too neat. For it mentions an objective good for the individual, identified as psychic harmony, the integration of the personality under the direction of the intellect. And the direction of the intellect is to be understood as the systematic pursuit of a goal or goals apprehended by the intellect as supremely good. But what are these goals, or what is this goal? It plainly will not do to say that the goal is psychic harmony itself, since psychic harmony is defined via the apprehension and pursuit of some goal. Nor will it be helpful to say that the goal is the Form of the Good. For that raises the question how the individual is supposed to pursue and to realize the Form of the Good. To that question only two answers seem possible. The first is that the individual realizes the Form of the Good by contemplating it. But in that case psychic harmony and hence *eudaimonia* are beyond the reach of the non-philosopher, and we have no alternative to accepting the version of extreme totalitarianism in which the non-philosophers achieve the best they are capable of by enabling the philosophers to contemplate the Good and thereby to achieve *eudaimonia*.[21] The other alternative is that the individual realizes the Form of the Good by being an instance of it, i.e. by bringing it about that his/her personality is in the best possible state. But this merely reinstates the original question: what goal or goals must the intellect direct the individual to pursue? The problem is not peculiar to Plato; any form of paternalism presupposes an answer to this question, which it cannot, therefore, itself supply. But the fundamental weakness of paternalism is that it assumes without justification that autonomy, i.e. self-direction in the light of the agent's own scheme of values, is not itself part of the best possible state for an individual. To put the point in Platonic terms, what prevents it from being the case that the philosopher's knowledge of the Form of the Good shows him that the good cannot be realized in rational agents unless autonomously, and therefore that the perfect organization of society demands that opportunities for autonomy be maximized? This suggestion cannot be refuted by the familiar observation that individuals may make

[21] It will not do to suggest that non-philosophers approximate to contemplation of the Good by having true beliefs about it which they take on trust from the philosophers; the gap is too great to allow talk of approximation to cut any ice.

autonomously bad choices both of particular actions and of ways of life, and hence that autonomy is a dispensable means to the production of an independently specifiable good. For the objection is not that a life's being autonomous is a sufficient condition of its being a good one (in which case it would be contradictory to describe someone as having overall made an autonomous choice of a bad life), but that it is a necessary condition. This allows that a life's being good requires that it realize a plurality of values, one of which is autonomy; the questions of the relative weighting of those values, and hence of the possible extent of trade-off between them, are of course further questions.

It might be replied that the producers in the ideal state are autonomous, since, knowing that the philosophers know what is best for them, they freely and indeed gladly accept their direction (e.g. 432a, 433c–d). This reply points up the incoherence in Plato's treatment of the producers. Either they have a coherent scheme of values, and are capable of organizing their lives in the light of it, or left to themselves they are merely a prey to their unco-ordinated, short-term bodily desires. In the latter case they can provide no direction to their lives, and must therefore be externally directed for their own good; but since they can make no autonomous choices at all, *a fortiori* they cannot autonomously choose to be directed by the guardians. If, on the other hand, they can direct their own lives in the light of their values, why do they need to be subject in every detail of their lives to the control of the guardians? Then, assuming that the producers are capable of autonomy, how do the guardians know that a life whose nearest approximation to autonomy consists in willingly accepting the direction of another is a better life than one in which autonomy has a central place? They certainly do not know that just in virtue of knowing that there are objective moral truths. For it may be an objective moral truth that autonomy is a central moral value. There is no inconsistency in an objectivist's assigning a central or indeed supreme value to autonomy, just as one may believe that while there are objective truths to be discovered, say, in philosophy, the aim of the activity is to *discover* them, not just accept them passively. The highest value, then, attaches to their independent discovery, but failing that it is better to arrive independently at erroneous views than to believe the truth purely on the word of someone else.

Plato is not, then, an extreme totalitarian, as Popper alleges. His theory is paternalist, as Vlastos shows, and in common with other varieties of paternalism conceals a crucial evaluative gap. He needs to show that an adequate conception of a good life need not include any substantial measure of autonomy, but he makes no attempt to do so. Indeed he shows no sign of awareness of the problem. His failure to provide a plausible

independent specification of the good life may easily lead a hostile critic to the view that he is in fact a totalitarian of the second type, who pays lip-service to the individual while identifying his good with his contribution to the perfectly organized state. This would be unjust to Plato, since it is clear that at least in intention he subordinates the perfectly organized state to the happy community. But it points to the central problem of paternalism, that of distancing itself from tyranny, and in that Plato is no more successful than his many successors.

XIII

UTOPIA AND FANTASY: THE PRACTICABILITY OF PLATO'S IDEALLY JUST CITY

M. F. BURNYEAT

The Graces, seeking a precinct that would not fail, found the soul of Aristophanes.

(attributed to Plato)

I

Utopia, according to Sir Thomas More, is a 'no place' (ou-topia) which is also a 'good place' (eu-topia). It is by definition an imaginary ideal.

The city described in Plato's *Republic* is a utopia in More's sense: a 'good place', called Kallipolis (527c), because it embodies every excellence a city can have (427e, 434e), and a 'no place' because it does not exist anywhere on earth (498d–e, 592b). It exists where it is constructed, in the discourse between Socrates and his interlocutors; that is, in their imagination, and in ours when we read the *Republic*. This is clear not only from the way in which Socrates frequently refers to the ideal city as the city built in discourse or speech or arguments,[1] but also from his use of the verb *mutholo-gein*, to tell a story, to characterize the narrative of the coming to be of the ideal city and the education of the guardians within it (376d–e, 501e).[2]

From this I draw my first conclusion, that the non-existence of the ideal city is a fact of history, not of metaphysics. If the description of the ideal city is an exercise in imaginative storytelling, it must be wrong to think, with Cornford and Popper, that the ideal city belongs to the ideal world in

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[1] *Logōi* 472d–e; *lexeōs* 473a; *en logois* 592a; cf. 369a–c, 371b, 374a, 379a, 394d, 422e, 428c, 433a, 434e, 450a–b, 451c, 452a, 456d, 458c, 473e, 497c, 530e, 534d, 546b, 557d, 558b, 595a.

[2] The first of these references is all the more emphatic in that it announces the critique of the *muthoi* by which the poets educate people in the ordinary world.