PLATO'S PSYCHOLOGY IN ITS BEARING ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF WILL

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(A Thesis approved, in its original form, for the Degree of Master of Arts in the University of London)

BY

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ERRATA

P. 11, line 2, *for* Rep. 438 E *read* Rep. 439 E.
P. 14, line 12, *for* distinctly *read* distinctively.
P. 47, Note 1, *for* Gorg. 506 E, 583 E *read* Gorg. 506 E, 503 E.

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Introduction

It may well appear at first sight an unwarrantable assumption that the notion of Will is in any sense an element in the Platonic psychology. Yet it can hardly be supposed that the phenomena which have attracted so large a share of attention among modern philosophers should have been overlooked by a mind of such extraordinary scope as Plato's—the philosopher who of all others might be said to have attained (in his own famous phrase) *θεωρία παντὸς μὲν χρόνου, πάσης δὲ οὐσίας*.[1] It is true that he has formulated no doctrine, has left us no definition—no single term even—that can be appropriated by the modern notion of Will; had he done so there would be no place for such an essay as this. Yet the very process of abstraction and classification by which philosophy or science makes headway brings with it its own dangers, and the mere fact of giving a name is apt to involve the fallacy of hypostatization. The name, given at first to what is merely one aspect of the whole, imports a false appearance of individuality, as though what is named were a part, separable from the totality; so Will has come to be regarded as a faculty of mind, almost, if one may use the metaphor, as a piece of the mind's furniture.

Now if it can be shown that Plato's account of mind as a whole does inevitably imply some such aspect of it as that now known as Will, his psychology is then the less

[1] Rep. 486 A.

misleading in that it has avoided the pitfall of hypostatization. That fallacy is seen perhaps at its worst in the phrase with which the notion under discussion seems now so inextricably entangled—viz. 'Free Will'—yet the notions of freedom and slavery as applied to conduct are familiar enough in Plato, and let but this modern idea of Will once shake off the fatal influence of the name and it will appear as merely one aspect of mental life—that aspect in which consciousness is regarded as an activity self-directed.

Now it was surely Plato himself who first made explicit the true nature of this activity of thought or consciousness, since it was he who first distinguished clearly the immaterial from the material.[1] Thenceforward there could be no more fusing of the two, the soul could no longer be conceived—even as Plato himself in his Heraclitean days must have conceived it—as a fiery substance. Parmenides' world of Pure Being had become after all attainable, though in a fashion he perhaps never dreamed of.

But there were ideas other than metaphysical that helped to form the Platonic psychology. Socrates discerned in the problems of right conduct the whole meaning of human life.[2] The essence of conduct was that it should be directed, not by mere chance, but by knowledge. Every form of human activity he found to be good only in so far as it kept its end in view—was aware of itself and what it was doing.[3] This then was the first requirement—to know oneself.[4] Knowledge of oneself would be knowledge of the end, of what one was 'good for', *ἑαυτὸν ἐπισκεψάμενος, ὁποῖός ἐστι πρὸς τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην χρείαν* (Mem. iv. 2. 25). But for right conduct one must have also knowledge of the means,[5] for knowledge alone secures variety of choice,[6]

[1] Cf. e.g. Rep. 611 E, 612 A.
[2] Xen. Mem. iii. 9. 10; iv. 6. 11.
[3] Mem. iii. 9. 4.
[4] Xen. Mem. iii. 9. 14.
[5] Mem. iv. 2. 25.
[6] Mem. iv. 2. 29.

and such knowledge must not be of mere words or opinions, but of realities.[1] So it came about that the right direction of self—in Kantian phrase, the Good Will—was identified by Socrates with Wisdom.[2] Only such self-direction and such wisdom or knowledge ensured true freedom—freedom of choice and freedom of action,[3] freedom in fact to choose the best.[4] But how is the best to be determined, how is Wisdom to be attained?

Through education, said Socrates, for the very best natures are those that need the most training; i.e. this native goodness seems, for him, to consist in a surpassing strength of activity, the more disastrous therefore if wrongly directed.[5] Yet after all this only carries us round in a circle: where, we may ask, does the educator himself get his notion of the Best? It was Plato's task to find a solution of this problem. Here again he gains an advantage from the greater fluidity and elasticity of a language not yet moulded and stamped by philosophy or metaphysics. The Greek usage of the very words *καλός* and *ἀγαθός* in constant association typifies the interchangeableness of the ethical and the aesthetic view of life; and Plato (whose very manner of speech betrays him in spite of his frequent railings against art)[6] looks out on life with an artist's eye.[7] He notes that in all skilled workmanship success depends on the presence of a certain law or principle[8] that guides the activity; the worker looks forward,[9] as it were, to this ideal, the perfect form of that which he is making.[10] It is thus homogeneity, harmony, order that characterize the best kind of activity.[11] Where then does this order and harmony, this ideal element come

[1] Mem. iv. 6. 1. [2] Mem. iii. 9. 4, 5. [3] Mem. iv. 5. 11. [4] Mem. iv. 5. 3.
[5] Mem. iv. 1. 4. [6] e.g. Rep. 392 A; cf. Rep. 595 B, 599 A.
[7] Rep. 377 E, 361 D, 540 C; Laws ii. 658–70, vii. 817 B. [8] Gorg. 503 E.
[9] This is characteristic of all that corresponds to true art; cf. Gorg. 501 B; Rep. 596 B. [10] Rep. 596 B. [11] Laws 746 D.

from? It seems to be, he says, in some fashion akin to man's nature,[1] *οἰκεῖον*, since he welcomes it with pleasure[2] (*τὸ δὲ ἡδὺ κοινὸν πάσαις (ταῖς μούσαις)* (Laws 802 C)). *Ὀρθότης*, 'rightness,' the mean between extremes, the 'neither too much nor too little' of art,[3] suggests also the straight growth of the healthy plant, developing harmoniously, neither one-sided nor twisted, but fulfilling the law of its being.[4] So man too has a nature, *φύσις*, which if given right nourishment will in process of time manifest its own perfection.

It is to be noted that the practice of the arts is sometimes, with Plato, more than a mere analogy of right conduct, it is even a heaven-sent means towards it.[5] So—often by way of jest, as when man is described as the plaything of the gods,[6] or by myths, Plato makes clear that for man as for the universe there is a perfect form, a pattern laid up in heaven, as it were, and yet latent within him and directing his growth; rhythm and order, harmony and balance, simplicity and law, these are all aspects of the same growth or development or, in Platonic language, of *φύσις*. It remains to examine more in detail the various stages of such development in the human soul.

The essential character of soul, of life, is movement.[7] Yet movement must be conceived as directed; *ψυχή* as itself the source of movement is therefore *self*-direction.[8] Every living organism, *σῶμα ἔμψυχον*, possesses in a sense this character, this is the principle of growth (*φύσις*).[9] But nature thus comes to have at once the dual aspect so constantly the problem of philosophy:[10] motion is directed to an end; it answers to change, to a process of *becoming*[11]

[1] Laws 733 A. [2] Lysis 221 E, 222 A.
[3] Cf. Symp. 210 B and Phaedr. 250, where the same power is ascribed to the love of beauty. [4] Cf. Laws 765 E.
[5] Pol. 274 C; Tim. 47 C; Laws ii. 659 E; cf. also Laws vii. 803 E.
[6] Laws ii. 644 D. [7] Laws x. 895 C. [8] Laws x. 896 A. [9] Phaedr. 245 E.
[10] Phil. 15 E; also Phil. 14 C, D; Tim. 57 E. [11] Laws x. 896 A.

whose end would be a state of *being*, implying rest and permanence.[1] Movement may be conceived as from point to point, the Many thus growing into a Unity, Parts into a Whole.[2]

Again, the twofold notion, of movement, and of that which moves as at once the origin and result of the motion, corresponds to the dualism of Form and Matter.[3] Regarded as growth this becomes assimilation,[4] involving an inward and an outward,[5] a subject and an object,[6] self and other[7]—the two sides always complementary, interdependent. From within ψυχῆς φύσις is a latent possibility of development,[8] an inherent power of self-direction (ὁρμή), yet from without comes the sustenance,[7] the means appropriate to sustain each form of motion,[8] giving the impulse, and in so far supplying its direction. As a stream,[9] though keeping its original direction, will alter its character, i. e. take this or that shape or direction[10] according to the nature of the country which feeds it, or as a plant will assimilate itself to the soil or climate and yet assimilate their nourishment to itself,[11] so with the growth and development of the soul. Psychology would seem to be concerned with the inward aspect of the process, yet on examination this is seen to be inextricably involved in the other—the inward presupposes the outward, the outward the inward. So intimate is the relation between self and others, the individual and the community, that like the sphere or the circle there is neither beginning nor end, but the whole is self-contained.[12] Yet after all the whole itself thus conceived seems to be only relatively permanent (for it admits of growth (αὐξανομένη) and decay), and

[1] Soph. 256 E. [2] Soph. 249 D; cf. also Laws x. 896 D. [3] Laws x. 897.
[4] So in Rep. x. 611 C. [5] Laws x. 897 A. [6] Cf. Tim. 37 B.
[7] Rep. x. 611 C. [8] Tim. 90 C. [9] Cf. Cratyl. 415 D.
[10] Cf. also Cratyl. 419, 420; Rep. 485 D. [11] Laws vi. 765 E; Rep. 491 D.
[12] Rep. 424 A (Book IV).

so seems to demand some further explanation, some ultimate origin for the changing in the changeless.[1] All that partakes of soul, says Plato, is changing.[2] Yet through such change the changeless is revealed, for 'in changing they move according to law and the order of destiny'.[3] The origin of the whole lies beyond the power of human thought, the self-moved is a divine creation, its impulse (ὁρμή) is of the eternal.[4] Only in this way can a meaning be found for the phrase in Rep. 424 A ἐάνπερ ἅπαξ ὁρμήσῃ εὖ, that is to say, we must ascribe to God the arrangement of the universe whereby good shall ultimately predominate over evil[5]—he implants the principle of growth (φύσις), his purpose is the nature of the whole, ὁ τοῦ παντὸς ἐπιμελούμενος (Laws 903 B). Yet this nature is a principle of self-movement, self-development, in the individual soul[6] (ἐν ἑαυτοῖς κεκτημένα τὴν τῆς μεταβολῆς αἰτίαν), which is left to retrace for itself the order of the universe, to find the direction in which it is in fact started, to assimilate its will to the divine.[7] So, repeatedly in the form of myths, Plato describes the beginnings of psychic movement. After this fashion in the Politicus a new meaning is given to the old fable of the 'earth-born men'. These are described as being under the immediate government of God;[8] there was no such thing as a community; of mental development under such conditions we can say nothing (ἀφῶμεν ταῦτα).[9] Then the change came, and the pilot let go the helm and retired[10]—the age of innocence was succeeded by an age of tradition.[11] This, through the disorder of the world's inherent nature, threatens to plunge it in chaos;[12] the pilot again intervenes and takes the helm,[13] and there succeeds the age we know, in which mankind, no longer the child of

[1] Rep. ix. 592 B. [2] Laws x. 904. [3] Ibid. [4] Rep. 611 E.
[5] Laws x. 904 B. [6] Ibid. C. [7] Cf. Tim. 29 E; cf. also Tim. 90 C.
[8] Pol. 271 E. [9] Pol. 272 D. [10] Pol. 272 E. [11] Pol. 273 B.
[12] Ibid. C. [13] Ibid. D.