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"THE EVIL THAT MEN DO LIVES AFTER THEM"

(Sometimes)

A STUDY OF
TWENTIETH CENTURY ANALYSIS OF
PLATO'S POLITICAL THEORY

by

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April 16, 1979

The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones.

-- Shakespeare

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INTRODUCTION

This is not a paper on Plato -- at least not consciously. It is a paper on 20th Century analysis of Plato -- ways in which Plato has been looked at, could be looked at, and, perhaps, should be looked at. Most of all, it is a plea for clarity of intellectual position.

Plato is a unique figure in political theory. In one way, his thought seems very detached from our own. His culture and language have long been lost; his style of presenting arguments is alien to our own. Yet even most of his "critics," find something strangely alluring in his writing. Warner Fite notes that people think of Plato as if a mystical, even divine, aura surrounded him.¹ Whether it is because of some esthetic attractiveness in his vision, some ingenuity in his presentation, some depth in his understanding or merely some exaggeration in his reputation, writers simply do not think of Plato in the way they think of Hobbes, Machiavelli or Nietzsche.

Dealing with Plato's reputation has sometimes been difficult. Some writers have taken it upon themselves to attack Plato and prove that he was just a mere mortal; this has led others to take up the moral cause of defending Plato with an all-but-religious fervor. This is unfortunate, because the loser in such battles will never be Plato, but may very well be ourselves. I see Plato neither as a god who must be dethroned, nor a cause which must be defended, but rather as an incredible resource which is all too often wasted.

Politics is not an easy process. Almost daily, we are forced to choose between competing values. These choices take place over

¹Warner Fite, The Platonic Legend (New York, Charles Scribner's Son's, 1934), pp. 2-3. Fite is one of the writers who sets out to dispell this image.

things as minor as whether we choose to uphold the value of free expression or the value of peace and quiet when our neighbor's record player is turned up too loud, or as major as whether we choose to uphold one or the other value when political dissidents ask to speak in a public forum. To make a choice between conflicting values is among the most important and difficult challenges individuals must face, and we owe it to ourselves not to make these choices blindly. To understand how to make these decisions, we must try to learn why we hold the values we hold: where they came from and what we are rejecting when we hold some values and not others.

It is here that the study of the ideas of the past becomes so important. This study can help us in three ways: first, it can help us to see what it means to have different perspectives on politics, and thus, broaden our viewpoint; second, it can help us to understand ourselves, by allowing us to see where our ideas about politics came from and what these ideas mean; finally, it can help us to act, by giving us a framework in which we can make sense of our choices between values. The study of ideas of the past can help us to learn what we believe and why, and this knowledge about our values helps us to choose between them.

Plato is amazingly well-gearred to help us in finding what our values are, precisely because he seems to have such a power over them. Somehow, our intellectual roots seem to lie in Plato's dialogues, if for no other reason than the fact that Plato is the source for so much of our political language.² Yet Plato's argument is different from our own. Thus, Plato represents not only a source

²See Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision (Boston: Little, Brown Co., 1960), pp. 27, 33, cf. Eric A. Havelock, The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 12.

of our ideas about politics, but also a challenge to these ideas. Plato raised a wealth of questions about politics. If we are to answer them differently from the way he did, the study of Plato compels us to figure out why.

This paper has two purposes. The first is to develop a theory about what approach to the ideas of the past in general, and Plato in particular, will help us the most in learning how to act in politics. I hope to do this by examining and evaluating the ways in which 20th Century analysts have looked at Plato. The second purpose is to provide an example of the type of analysis I believe to be the most useful. I hope to apply my approach not to Plato, but to those who have analyzed Plato, in an effort to make the most use of these writers' ideas. Chapter One is a general overview of the analysts I will be discussing; Chapters Two, Three and Four deal with what it means to approach Plato in a particular way; Chapter Five provides a discussion of what approach to Plato is likely to be the most useful; Chapter Six is a brief conclusion.

My analysis rests on two important initial assumptions. The first is that political action is based on political ideas -- that individuals make choices in politics based on the theoretical values they hold. The second assumption is that the goal of understanding our values -- the principles on which we act -- is best served when we challenge them with as many different views about politics as possible. I will be suggesting that it is not the nature of the view of politics an author has, but rather an author's failure to be cognizant of the limitations of his/her viewpoint that makes an approach to political thought less than useful.

This last point needs some clarification. I believe that the attempt to view the past inevitably involves a tradeoff between presenting a thinker's ideas "faithfully" in the way he/she had intended them to be presented, and viewing a thinker's ideas in the ways we would like to.³ As J. G. A. Pocock suggests, the attempt to study the past is an act of translation,⁴ and I believe that something is always lost in translation. Much as we might like to have Plato's opinions on modern questions, Plato never addressed the problems of industrialized mass society, or, for that matter, the threat of totalitarian regimes to individual liberty. To apply Plato to our modern world can only be accomplished if we extrapolate from what he said, and we must realize that we do this at the cost of fidelity to Plato's intentions. Yet, an analysis which seeks to avoid extrapolating from Plato's ideas is done at the cost of limiting the extent to which Plato's ideas can be applied to our own problems.

This tradeoff is especially important because the process of deciding "what Plato said" can never be completely severed from that of deciding "what Plato means to us." It is clear that we cannot hope to evaluate Plato unless we have some idea about what it is Plato said. It is sometimes forgotten, however, that we cannot determine what Plato said without bringing in some of our preconceptions about what sorts of issues political theory ought to address. Plato could never have been seen to address the issue of whether politics should be based on a "limits-to-growth" perspective, until that issue became important to those who read Plato.

³J. Renford Bambrough makes a similar argument about what he calls the "paradox of the universal sympathetic interpretation." He argues that any observer who disagrees with Plato is liable to misinterpret

This seems to leave us with two alternatives: either we give up on the possibility of learning from the past altogether, or we make ourselves aware of the fact that any approach to the past we may use is limited, and accept the possibility that there may be something to be gained from each of many approaches. I choose to support the latter. I will argue that to make the most use of the past, we must be both conscious of the assumptions we have had to make, and tolerant of approaches which differ from our own.

Accordingly, I am painfully aware of some of the compromises that I have had to make in this work -- for I, too, seek both to interpret and evaluate. These will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters One and Five. The reader may also learn something of my biases by reading the Bibliographic Essay which I have included. In my own defense, I can only hope that the reader, rather than rejecting my arguments because of the limitations in my perspective, will try to profit from learning of these limitations.

the ideas of Plato, and yet, refraining from interpretation relegates all theoretical works to a position of solely antiquarian interest. See his essay, "Plato Modern Friends and Enemies," reprinted in J. Renford Bambrough, ed., Plato, Popper and Politics (Cambridge, England: W. Heffer and Son's Limited, 1967), pp. 6-7.

⁴J. G. A. Pocock, "Languages and Their Implications: The Transformation of the Study of Political Thought," in Politics, Language and Time (New York: Atheneum, 1973), p. 7.

CHAPTER ONE: On Analyzing Analysts

John Wild has commented that "almost every influential modern ethical position has been imputed to Plato."⁵ Indeed, 20th Century analysts have thought of Plato as, among other things, the symbol of totalitarianism, the source of the natural law tradition, the progenitor of all Western thought, and as a petty aristocrat with a poor understanding of human nature and questionable morals. To try to discuss and compare such diverse views is something of a challenge, and there is certainly more than one way of going about it.

It is for this reason that I have decided to begin this study by providing a general overview of the nature of 20th Century analysis of Plato,⁶ and a brief discussion of how I will be approaching the subject. In this chapter, I will explain why I feel it is useful to study those who have analyzed Plato, and why I have chosen to examine the particular writers I have; I will also discuss the method I will be using to examine these analysts, and finally, the way in which this study will be organized.

Why study analysts of Plato? The answer to this question is twofold. First, it is useful to study those who have analyzed Plato for the same sort of reason that it is useful to study Plato -- such a study can help us to understand ourselves, and to act politically. I believe that we can learn something about the way individuals view politics, by examining how they view Plato. Each of these analysts

⁵ John Wild, Plato's Modern Enemies and the Theory of Natural Law (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 61-62.

⁶ A more specific summary of each of the analyses of Plato which will be discussed in the study is provided in the Bibliographic Essay which follows the text.

read the same works, and had roughly the same line of historical investigation open to them, and yet many reached different conclusions about what Plato said, and how we should view Plato's message. Examining how modern writers have seen Plato is a way of assessing how modern political experiences -- such a liberal democracy, totalitarianism, mass politics, technological growth and philosophies of history -- have affected 20th Century political thought.

Second, an examination of 20th Century analysts of Plato is useful for providing what a discussion of Plato cannot -- it can help us to understand what ways of approaching the past are likely to be the most useful. Plato is a tremendous resource, but he cannot teach us how to use his ideas. It is only through examining what it means to take each of a variety of approaches to Plato that we can learn what the costs of taking a particular approach to Plato is, and ultimately what makes some approaches more productive than others. Thus, a study of 20th Century analysis of Plato can be useful both for gaining knowledge about ourselves, and knowledge about the useful ways of viewing the past.

Why these particular analysts? I have chosen the particular writers I will be discussing because I find their arguments interesting and illustrative, and not necessarily because they represent the most important works on Plato. This is not to say that I have consciously avoided works which have been influential, but rather that I have tried to include works which have not been the subject of a great deal of critical discussion in an effort to present a wide range of views on Plato.

As will become apparent, I have tried to discuss writers whose views differ a great deal from my own, and even writers whose argu-

ments I find untenable and unconvincing. Because this is intended to be a discussion of the ways in which Plato has been analyzed, and not an analysis of Plato, I will only assess the value of general approaches and will not devote space in the text to expressing my disagreement with specific arguments. It should be understood, however, that silence is by no means intended to imply consent.

The inverse is also true, however. Because I will be trying to find the implications and costs of taking an approach to Plato, my writing may tend to sound, at times, as if I am merely trying to debunk the analysis done on Plato. This is not my intent. I believe that almost all the views I will be discussing have at least some merits as arguments, and all are interesting enough to be worth contemplating. As I mentioned in the introduction, I believe that there are limitations in any approach to the past one might use; it is essential to understand the limitations of an argument if we are to use it effectively.

How this study will be approached. My analysis will involve both interpretation and evaluation. In my interpretation, I hope to take advantage of what I believe to be an unusual perspective to discover what is at stake in deciding to view Plato in a particular way. The perspective I will use will be to examine not only what the analysts say, but also what sorts of assumptions underlie their approaches, and what sorts of arguments would challenge their position. The issues at stake include not only the question of how Plato ought to be viewed, but also how useful the past can possibly be in helping us to act, and what sorts of political ideology ought to be more influential in our thinking. I hope to discover not only what these writers have accepted when they chose to approach Plato in a particular way, but also what they have rejected.

In my evaluation, I hope to determine how successful these writers have been in helping us to understand ourselves, and thus, to act in politics.⁷ I will try to find the limitations in their arguments, and assess how significant these limitations are. Finally, in Chapter Five, I will discuss what elements of analysis make one approach more useful than another.

How this study will be organized. I will discuss the approaches to Plato along three different levels of analysis. At the first level is the question "should Plato be studied at all?"; at the second is the question "assuming that Plato is worth studying, can we possibly make use of his ideas?"; at the third is the question "assuming that we can use Plato's ideas, how can we go about doing so most effectively?" Each of these will be discussed briefly here.

In Chapter Two, I will discuss some analysts who address the question "should Plato be studied at all?" -- or in other words, "was Plato sufficiently perceptive in his comments on the human experience that his views can possibly help us?" Writers who answer "no" to this question suggest that it is not worth the effort to try to relate Plato's time to our own. In this chapter, I will be primarily concerned with the arguments of John Jay Chapman and Warner Fite.

In Chapter Three, I will discuss analysts who address the question "can we possibly make use of Plato's ideas" -- i.e. "can we apply what Plato said to our own political problems?" This question

⁷One might well ask at this point, "did each of these writers intend to be useful in this way?" I believe that this basis of evaluation is fair because I define "usefulness" very broadly. All writers seek to be "useful" in the sense that they try to increase our understanding about some aspect of our world, and I believe that it is reasonable to judge writers based on the extent to which they achieve this end.

has involved whether it is possible to transcend differences in political environment and in perceptions of "politics" to compare Plato's ideas to our own. Writers who believe that such a comparison cannot be made suggest that there is no reason to try to determine some "best" way of using Plato's ideas. Writers who believe that Plato's thought can be compared with our own, have divided over the best way of making the comparison. This chapter will include a discussion of quite a few writers, most importantly, Alban Dewes Winspear, Karl Popper, Charles Howard McIlwain, G. Lowes Dickinson, Eric Havelock, Alvin Gouldner, F. E. Sparshott, Sheldon Wolin and David Grene.

In Chapter Four, I will discuss analysts who present ways of making use of Plato's ideas. Specifically I will examine three of the more interesting ways in which 20th Century analysts have viewed Plato -- the view of Plato as a "totalitarian" or a "democrat", the view of Plato as a "natural law theorist", and the view of Plato as a "limits-to-growth" theorist. I will discuss what is at stake in each of these views, and how these approaches differ, as well as how effective each is in helping us to make use of Plato. Among the writers who will be discussed in this chapter are: J. Renford Bambrough, Bertrand Russell, Karl Popper, R. H. S. Crossman, Ronald Levinson, John Hallowell, Leo Strauss, John Wild, Mulford Q. Sibley and William Ophuls.

CHAPTER TWO: Is Plato Worth Studying?

I begin my discussion of how Plato has been analyzed with an examination of two writers who question whether Plato ought to be studied at all. These two writers -- John Jay Chapman and Warner Fite -- are worth reviewing not because their position is a popular one, but rather because the extreme nature of their argument has interesting implications. Studying Chapman and Fite is useful not only for discovering what it means to suggest that Plato's argument is of no value, but also for illuminating the assumptions one must make if one is to argue that Plato deserves consideration. Moreover, while it is unusual for analysts to suggest that a major theorist of the past was imperceptive, and even dangerous, such an argument has become quite important in other contexts. As such, a study of Chapman and Fite is useful for understanding some of the ideological issues at stake when one suggests that Darwin is not worth studying, or that it is dangerous to be exposed to the arguments of Communists or Nazis.

My discussion in this chapter will be directed toward answering the following questions: first, "what is one saying when one suggests that Plato ought not to be studied?" -- "what assumptions are involved in taking such a position?"; second, "what does this view imply about the way we ought to view the past, and about the way we ought to view our own political questions?"; finally, "how useful is this approach in helping us to understand ourselves?". Each will be discussed, in turn.

What is one saying when one suggests that Plato ought not to be studied? Like all writers who attempt to approach Plato, Chapman and Fite have to deal not only with Plato's arguments, but also

with Plato's reputation. Unlike most of the other writers, Chapman and Fite suggest that this reputation is almost totally ungrounded. While the objections they raise to Plato's argument -- e.g. faulting Plato for suggesting that the state should be ruled by those with "technical know-how" rather than those with "common sense" -- are not all that unusual,⁸ the conclusion they draw about Plato is. Chapman and Fite suggest that differences between our views and Plato's should not be considered merely as differences in opinion or perspective, but rather as evidence of Plato's lack of perception and failure to understand human nature. For Fite and Chapman, Plato was an unexceptional thinker, who is not worth our time.

Neither of these two writers suggest reasons why one ought to approach Plato with a view towards deciding how perceptive he was. As such, one can only attempt to infer what their assumptions about political thought and analysis are from the nature of their argument. The two most important assumptions seem to concern what we can know about politics, and how we should treat ideas which differ from our own.

Chapman and Fite imply that there are some statements one could make about the nature of man and politics which are true and have been true since Plato's time. They assume that anyone who is reasonably perceptive knows what these truths are, and that anyone who does not recognize these truths is obviously less than perceptive. Among these truths is that pederasty is immoral and unpermissable (Chapman) and that there is no place for an aristocratic or "technocratic" elite in political rule (Fite).⁹

⁸ Similar arguments are made by Karl Popper, R. H. S. Crossman and M. I. Finley, among others. See Bibliographic Essay.

⁹ See Bibliographic Essay for a further discussion of their arguments.

To understand what it means to make these assumptions about political knowledge, it is helpful to see what some conflicting assumptions would look like. First, one might suggest that there are no such things as "knowable truths" of the sort Chapman and Fite describe -- that these are merely societal understandings or a balance of opinions with no intrinsic "rightness"; this is the sort of argument Popper, Crossman and Wolin make. Second, one might suggest that there are "knowable truths" but that these truths are timebound -- that what is true for us may not have been true for Plato; this is the perspective one might find in some sort of theory of historical development.¹⁰ Finally, one might suggest that, while there are "knowable truths," very few people are capable of such knowledge, and that Chapman and Fite are not among this select group; this is the sort of argument Leo Strauss might make. Thus, Chapman and Fite implicitly reject a wide range of possible positions when they hold that the average individual knows what is "right" in politics.

The second assumption Chapman and Fite seem to make is that an argument which differs from our own ought to be rejected. Chapman even goes so far as to suggest that Plato's views on morality are dangerous, and both believe that Plato's argument is not really worth considering. To Chapman and Fite, any differing idea must be not only "wrong" but poorly conceived, and cannot be learned from.

Here again, it is useful to examine what differing assumptions might look like. One might suggest that a "wrong" idea is not necessarily poorly conceived and, in fact, that the really dangerous ideas are those that are "wrong" but are conceived so well as to be

¹⁰Alban Winspear applies this sort of view of historical development to analyzing Plato, but does not feel that there ever have been "truths" in the way Chapman and Fite use the term. See Chapter Three.

persuasive; that is the argument M. I. Finley makes. Alternatively, one might suggest that even if an argument is "wrong" and poorly conceived, we ought to review it, if only to discover what led someone to make such a poor argument; this point is raised by Alvin Gouldner. Thus, it is significant that Chapman and Fite assume both that one can tell that a belief about politics is "wrong," and that nothing can be learned from a wrong belief. These two assumptions seem to set them apart from a great many other writers.

What does this view imply? This question, like the last, is somewhat difficult to answer. Because Chapman and Fite are not very clear about what their assumptions are, one cannot always be sure whether a particular view of the past or of politics is a basis on which they make their argument, or an implication that one can draw from their argument. Here again, I will try to make inferences based on my view of their argument.

Chapman and Fite seem to accept that the use we can, and ought to, make of the past is quite limited. They suggest that we can look to other ideas only for positive reinforcement of those things the average individual knows to be true. Accordingly, they imply that the average individual is capable of judging on some objective standard whether a thinker of the past is useful, and, in turn that a thinker may be "objectively uninspiring" even though he/she has undeniably inspired others. To Chapman and Fite, such inspiration can only be the power of a false prophet.

More importantly, Chapman and Fite seem to imply that the whole process of attempting to speculate about the principles which underlie politics is not very useful. They believe that we can know everything

important about politics through "common sense" and that nothing can be gained by challenging these ideas. This is an interesting view of political ideology; it suggests that what helps us to act politically, and reach our "goals" as a society, is an acceptance of what we all generally know to be correct, rather than an effort to discover more about our world, and ourselves, through "rational" means. In short, the way Chapman and Fite approach Plato implies that the past can only be used to find ideas which agree with our own, and suggests a view of politics which might be termed, at the risk of overgeneralization, "anti-intellectualism."

How useful is this approach? I have tried to suggest the the understandings Chapman and Fite seem to have of political analysis is far from universal. Yet, the real weakness of their argument is not that it rests on assumptions which one might disagree with, but rather that it rests on assumptions which cannot be "disagreed" with. As such, I believe their argument to be unconvincing and untestable.

Chapman and Fite seem to assume the "common sense" will lead us to understand why the study of conflicting theory cannot possibly be productive -- i.e. that we already know their approach to be intuitively correct.¹¹ Yet, if a reader does not already agree with the approach -- i.e. if he/she lacks "common sense" -- the reader is unlikely to be won over to Chapman and Fite's argument, since their viewpoint is not one which can be accepted "rationally." To put this another way, much more than assuming that everyone

¹¹Chapman, for example, argues that Plato "takes the mind off its troubles and supplies it with imaginative solutions for problems which do not press." Chapman believes this to be an objective statement about the way Plato affects anyone with "common sense." Lucian, Plato, and Greek Morals (Cambridge, Mass.: The Riverside Press, 1931), pp. 172-173.

ought to agree with their argument, Chapman and Fite assume that everyone who is sufficiently perceptive already does, and that anyone who is not perceptive -- those Chapman calls "armchair visionaries"¹ -- never will. Thus, the large number of people who do not agree with the assumptions Chapman and Fite make suggests that "common sense" is not very common at all.¹³

Moreover, their approach cannot be tested -- empirically or analytically. Because Chapman and Fite do not set out what their criteria are for determining whether a writer is worth studying, one can never decide whether they have judged Plato accurately. When the reader can only infer criteria from the judgement, it is impossible to test a writer's consistency. Here again, the very different conclusions Leo Strauss reaches from what would seem to be a similar assumption about the existence of political knowledge, suggests that the accuracy of the judgement Chapman and Fite make could at least be challenged.

The impact of these two arguments -- that Chapman and Fite are very unlikely to convince someone to agree with their viewpoint, and that their approach cannot be tested -- is to suggest that their argument is less than useful to anyone who makes different assumptions or comes to different conclusions. This problem stems not from the fact that their position is usual, but rather because they never explain the way in which their position really challenges others. It is only when we know the reasons for adopting a viewpoint that we can decide to adopt it, or decide why it is that we reject it.

¹²Ibid., p. 173.

¹³In fact, Chapman and Fite seem to disagree with each other over exactly what constitutes "common sense." See Bibliographic Essay.

Summary. In this chapter, I have suggested that the arguments of John Jay Chapman and Warner Fite are worth examining, even if these arguments are not very useful in helping us to act. Accordingly, I have tried to illuminate some of the broad assumptions and implications which are involved in arguing that Plato is not worth studying, and have tried to point to some of the assumptions one might make which would lead one to the opposite conclusion.

Specifically, I have argued that the conclusion made by Chapman and Fite that Plato was less than perceptive rests, or at least seems to rest, on the assumptions that the average individual can, and, in fact, does know what is "right" in politics, and that ideas which are not "right" cannot be learned from. I have gone on to suggest that this implies that the past can only be used in a limited way, to positively reinforce our own ideas, and that the way to the way to the "good society" is through accepting those things we know from "common sense" and not attempting to act from speculative or technical knowledge. Finally, I have argued that this approach is less than useful because it fails to present a way in which we can challenge our assumptions. The next chapter will examine writers who have explicitly or implicitly rejected the full thrust of the argument made by Chapman and Fite -- those writers who have found it necessary to examine whether Plato's thought can be compared to our own.

CHAPTER THREE: CAN WE COMPARE PLATO'S THOUGHT

TO OUR OWN?

The title of this chapter is somewhat misleading. It implies that this chapter, like the last, will deal with a simple "yes or no" sort of question. The issue of "comparability" -- whether Plato was really writing on the same sorts of things which concern us, and whether we need ask that question before reading the dialogues -- is central to any understanding of what we can learn from Plato, and is not a question which has generally received a simple answer. I have entitled this chapter, "can we compare Plato's thought to our own?" because it is the one central question which concerns all the writers to be discussed here, and, because phrasing the question this way makes it clear that it can be answered "no."

Plato lived in 4th Century Athens; we read him in the industrialized world of the 20th Century. Plato presented a specific view of the possibility of conflict-free politics, and related this view to principles which governed the whole of human experience; many who read the dialogues have accepted that politics is, by definition, a world of conflict and flux -- a world which is in some measure separate from the principles which govern other fields. Applying Plato to our own problems requires an act of "translation." In this chapter I will discuss the terms of that translation. Section One will discuss opinions on how the distance of time and circumstance conditions the way Plato can be viewed; Section Two will deal with how one's view of politics as a subject of discussion conditions analysis of Plato.

Section One: Plato and Time

Every writer who attempts to make any use of Plato's argument is confronted, almost immediately, with the difficulty of interpreting a writer who spoke a different language, at a different time, in a different culture. As long as these differences remain, there will always be a tradeoff between fidelity to Plato's views, as he intended them to be understood, and fidelity to the need to find answers to the questions of a different culture. The only way to avoid the distortion inevitable in interpretation, and the trade-off inevitable in application is to avoid these two processes altogether -- to accept that we cannot make use of Plato at all. This section will discuss both the limitations and the advantages of the different ways in which analysts have approached the problem of stemming the gap between Plato's time and our own. Here again, I hope to determine how useful these approaches are in helping us to understand how to act. I have found it helpful to group the analysts I will be discussing based on their response to two questions:

First, "is it appropriate to try to derive useful ideas about politics from the writing of an individual who lived in a different time and under different circumstances?". Writers who answer "no" to this question adopt the position that one cannot, or perhaps, should not look to the past for guidance.

Second, "if it is appropriate, are there any enduring characteristics of political theory or the political experience which provide a basis of comparison between the views of the past and our own?". Writers who answer "yes" to this question adopt the position that there exists an objectively identifiable element in politics which transcends differences in political environment. Writers who an-

"no" to this question suggest that while concerns of politics may not be objectively identifiable, one can relate more subjective impressions about a writer's position in his own age to our understanding of him in our age. These three positions will be discussed separately,¹⁴ along the same lines that I used when discussing the position of Chapman and Fite.

1) We Cannot Go Back. While many analysts have mentioned the difficulty of attempting to use Plato's ideas to aid us in our own problems, most have been willing to brave this challenge.¹⁵ A coherent theory suggesting why the past cannot be used is presented, however, by Alban Dewes Winspear. As mentioned above, I will discuss this view in three sections: first, I will examine what it is Winspear is saying, then, what this position implies about the way we ought to view the past, and the way we ought to view politics, and finally, how useful this approach is in helping us to act in politics.

What is this argument saying? Winspear's argument is a combination of two theories of historical development. The first, which one might associate with Hegel,¹⁶ suggests that Plato is a representative of a primitive stage in the historical development of thought. As such, while we may examine Plato to learn of our philosophic roots, we cannot expect to find answers for our modern problems in the dialogues. The second, which one might associate with Marx,¹⁷

¹⁴Although some writers combine elements of two or all three of these approaches, they are still sufficiently distinct to be worth discussing separately.

¹⁵See for example, Ernest Barker, The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle (London: Methuen & Co., 1906), pp. 1-15. See Bibliographic Essay for more examples.

¹⁶See Lectures on the History of Philosophy, E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson, trans., (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1894), v. II, pp. 9-10.

suggests that the historical conditions which have controlled politics at least up until this point have made it impossible for any writer to venture even an honest attempt to rise above his own, narrow, partisan views. As such, Plato represented only the interests of a certain class during his day, and not any enduring or transcendent "vision" of the political.

Thus, Winspear makes the assumption that politics and political thought has followed a specific line of historical development and concludes that Plato's thought was both primitive and partisan. Moreover, he suggests that Plato's political views were those of a "romantic conservative" -- a primitive among primitives. Winspear strongly objects to the approach Chapman and Fite use, because they suggest that Plato's argument is inadequate on its face, without reference to the time in which Plato lived. Yet, Winspear's conclusion is not all that different from theirs -- Plato cannot help us to act in our modern world.

What does this position imply? Like Chapman and Fite, Winspear makes a strong statement about the way we ought to view the past, and the way we ought to view politics. He suggests that we can only understand the ideas of the past by learning of the historical conditions which led to these ideas, and that, once we understand these conditions, we will know why the past cannot be used to aid the present. In other words, Winspear is suggest that "primitive" thought is objectively uninfluential, even if people have claimed to be influenced by it.

¹⁷This argument is really better associated with Marxists than with Marx himself, although this sort of sentiment can be seen in some of Marx's more dramatic moments. See especially, Communist Manifesto, in Robert C. Tucker, ed. Marx-Engels Reader (New York, W. W. Norton & Co., Inc. 1972), p. 349.

Moreover, Winspear implies that we must interpret the writing of the past so that it "fits" our knowledge of the historical background of the author. If, for example, we know that Plato was an aristocrat, and find that he made a comment in one of the dialogues which would seem to damage the aristocratic cause, Winspear suggests that we must interpret the comment as a subtle political ploy. Thus, what Plato (allegedly) meant, is more important than what he said.

A final important implication of Winspear's approach on how we ought to view the past is that one cannot really determine whether an idea of the past is "good" or "bad." If all ideas stem from partisan positions on issues which are out of date, it is difficult to see how one can say that one or another viewpoint on any such issue had the more "worthy" claim. Winspear himself, however, does seem to make this sort of judgement about Plato's argument.¹⁸

Winspear's position also implies a very specific view of politics. It suggests that there is no such thing as a political "vision" and that anyone who claims to recognize some transcendent view of the good is merely a dishonest political partisan. This view applies not only to Plato, but to any modern analyst who disagrees with Winspear's argument. This position resembles that of Chapman and Fite in the sense that it suggests that there is some "correct" understanding about the way society operates and implies that if one were really perceptive one would recognize this fact. Where Winspear differs from the other two writers is that he believes that the "correct" understanding is that beliefs in moral standards are

¹⁸I believe that Winspear is inconsistent in suggesting that Plato's "aristocratic" position is less worthy than the position of Plato's opponents. A similar problem is Winspear's suggestion that Plato's methods were, presumably in some "objective" way, devious. See The Genesis of Plato's Thought (New York: Dryden Press, 1940), esp. pp. 71-80.

dependent on historical circumstances. He would suggest that what Chapman and Fite call "truths" are merely transitory manifestations of class interest. Moreover, Winspear believes that the "correct" view of politics is not one which is evident to the average individual, or even the average theorist.¹⁹ Thus, far from representing anti-intellectualism, Winspear is actually something of an intellectual elitist.

How useful is this approach? It goes without saying that the assumptions Winspear makes about politics and political thought differ a great deal from my own. Yet his approach is useful in a way that Chapman and Fite's is not, because he sets out the assumptions he makes. As I will discuss in Chapter Five, I can determine why it is I disagree with Winspear, and as I have already discussed, I can test Winspear's argument against his assumptions and suggest that he is not always consistent.

While this complement may seem left-handed, it is really a tribute to a certain amount of intellectual honesty in Winspear's approach. He points to the sorts of assumptions we may have to make about the past if we are to use it; he suggests that if we are to think of ourselves as being in some higher stage of development, we must not expect to look back for guidance. If we are to make use of the past, we must either show why this argument is wrong, or accept that in some significant way, we have not changed very much in 2500 years. I will now examine the views of some analysts who take the latter position.

2) There are enduring elements in politics. Writers who suggest that there is some characteristic about political thought or the political experience itself which can be understood without regard

¹⁹See Bibliographic Essay.

the environment of political theorists take a position which is almost diametrically opposed to Winspear's. One basis for this position is the belief that all political thinkers can be discussed and classified according to their relation to some central understanding about politics -- e.g. whether they are advocates of the "open society" or the "closed society." A second approach stems from the belief that all political thinkers have had to deal with certain narrow, yet persistent, questions -- e.g. on what basis can one determine that the governance of the state is legitimate. A third position of this sort involves the understanding that politics entails a certain commonality of experience which, itself, provides a basis of comparison between different ages -- e.g. that politics has always involved decision-making based on the principles which a society believes to be important. Each of these will be discussed, in turn.

a) Classification According to Central Understanding. The notion that there is some central principle which can be used to classify all political theorists is exemplified in the writing of Karl Popper. While he has not been the only analyst to approach the past this way,²⁰ his presentation on this point is particularly clear.

What is this argument saying? Popper suggests that Plato, along with Rousseau, Hegel, Marx and Hitler, was on the "wrong" side of a continuous struggle between the forces of the "closed society" -- the advocates of totalitarianism -- and those of the "open society" -- the advocates of liberal democracy. Popper believes that we must study Plato so that we may learn to identify the views of politics which lead to totalitarianism, wherever they may be found. Popper's

²⁰For a discussion of some of the other writers who approach Plato this way, see Chapter Four.

argument about what these views are will be discussed in the next chapter. Here, I will examine the assumptions about political analysis which lead Popper to take this view of the past.

Popper makes the assumption that politics has been characterized by the continuous struggle he describes -- that, at least since the time of tribal cultures, there have been elements of "repression" and elements of "freedom" in all societies. Moreover, he assumes that these elements can be observed and easily identified. According to Popper, we can recognize the same principles in Plato's views of politics that we find in Hitler's; we can see that Plato advocated policies which limit the freedom of the common man, and know that these policies meant the same thing in 4th Century Athens, as they do in our modern political world. Winspear would disagree with Popper's assumptions that struggles over these sorts of principles ever take place. Other differing assumptions will be examined when other approaches to Plato are examined.

What does this approach imply? As one might expect, Popper implies a view of the past which is almost directly opposed to that presented by Winspear. Popper suggests that a writer can rightly be categorized according to his/her views with virtually no reference to his/her historical circumstances. This is to say that a writer can correctly be linked to the implications which his/her thinking has tended to lead to, even if the writer never know of these implications. Thus, Plato ought to be called a "totalitarian" even if he did not know what the word "totalitarian" meant.

What Popper shares with Winspear, Chapman and Fite is the belief that it is important to decide what Plato ought to be "called" -- i.e. that the past ought to be judged. While for Winspear this

entails judging a thinker's background, for Popper, Chapman and Fite this entails determining whether a thinker's ideas were "right" or "wrong." Where Popper really differs from the other analysts is in suggesting that it may be useful to discuss a thinker even if our judgement about him/her is a negative one. For Popper, the thought of the past, and even "wrong" thought, has been influential and must be understood.

This approach leads Popper to view politics as a relatively simple process. He believes that the major political issues are very clear cut, and therefore that our political choices are fairly straightforward. While it may take a good deal of insight to determine the exact standards on which political thought ought to be judged, once we know what these standards are, the process of testing, categorizing and deciding between views is relatively easy. For Popper, the good life lies in deciding what our decisions mean, and then making them.

How useful is this approach? Popper makes a large tradeoff. He is willing to accept that there is no important difference between Plato's view of politics and Hitler's, and, as a result, must be willing to accept that his interpretation of Plato will be less than faithful to Plato's intentions. His approach is limited to isolating ways in which the past is very similar to the present, and is not very useful in understanding how the past differs from the present. Moreover, Popper's approach is limited to using the past to find answers which are very simple and clear cut, and not to help us in more complex issues.

If one agrees with Popper, and believes that politics has not changed very significantly and is relatively simple, then these

limitations are not very significant. It is therefore understandable that, while Popper is fairly conscious of the assumptions he makes, he is not aware of the ways in which his approach may be limited. Popper believes that he has described virtually all one needs to know about approaching politics, and that a different approach cannot provide any additional useful information.

The difficulty is that if one disagrees with Popper's view of politics, one is apt to decide that his approach is not very useful. If one believes, as I do, that political questions are very complex, then Popper's argument is weak -- in part because it only illuminates a little of what we need to know, and primarily because it does not admit of the possibility of using quite a few different approaches to help illuminate other things about politics. Thus, by failing to recognize the limitations in his approach, Popper makes it very difficult for anyone who disagrees with his argument to make use of it.

b) Comparison by Answers to Persistent Questions. Writers who attempt to find Plato's answers to certain narrow questions which have continually confronted theorists are less concerned than Popper is about classifying Plato into a broad scheme of thought. Whereas Popper tries to find whether Plato "believes in A or in B," these analysts could their questions in terms like "on what basis did Plato try to secure goal A," or "how would Plato say that we could tell when goal B has been secured." Popper attempts to delimit politics, by assuming that the answers to political questions remain the same over time, these analysts attempt only to delimit a specific field of inquiry by examining the myriad of answers which way have been offered to one of many important political questions. Writers who

use this approach include John T. Bookman and Charles Howard McIlwain.

What is this approach saying? It is not necessary to describe the specific questions Bookman and McIlwain discuss, to gain an understanding of what their approach involves.²¹ At first glance their assumptions seem similar to Popper's. Like Popper, Bookman and McIlwain assume that there is a general continuity to political thought -- that the issues which we believe to be important are the same ones which Plato believe to be important. Unlike Popper, however, Bookman and McIlwain assume that answers to political questions are not clear cut -- that there are many shades of difference among thinkers. Also unlike Popper, Bookman and, to some extent McIlwain,²² assume that their approach is neither perfectly accurate, nor absolutely definitive, and admit that their may be other useful ways of approaching Plato.

What does this approach imply? Like Popper, and unlike Winspear, Bookman and McIlwain imply that we can properly understand thinkers without reference to their historical circumstances, or, at least, that there is something to be gained through viewing thinkers this way.²³ Unlike the arguments discussed thus far, this approach implies that it is not necessary to "judge" the past, but merely that one ought to use the past for whatever guidance it can provide. Bookman, in particular, looks to Plato for a formulation about how

²¹Bookman deals with the question of whether dissent or disobedience to law can be justified; McIlwain is concerned with what makes the state legitimate.

²²McIlwain tends to think of the question he discusses as the "central" issue which has concerned political theorists, and attempts to develop a view of a "tradition" of thought. Yet he is quite conscious that he cannot hope to relate Plato's meaning precisely, and seems to admit of the possibility that there may be other relevant

to approach a subject, rather than a "correct" answer. Accordingly, while Bookman and McIlwain do see a continuity between the political thought of different times, they do not imply that Plato ought to be linked to the implications of arguments which post-date him, at least in the way Popper does.²⁴ In general, these analysts try to determine whether what Plato said can be useful to us, rather than what label we should apply to Plato.

These writers imply that politics is really a fairly complex process. There is no just one, but many relevant questions, and not just two, but many plausible answers to each question. On the other hand, Bookman, and especially McIlwain, suggest that the questions which need answers are apparent, and have always been the same. They imply that we can try to make sense of our political world, by examining the answers of those who have faced these questions before us.

How useful is this approach? Here again, there is a tradeoff between attempting to answer modern questions, and attempting to be faithful to Plato's intentions. This approach is limited because it inevitably leads to a certain amount of distortion in the account of Plato's views, and neglects the extent to which different political environments have led thinkers to ask different questions about politics. Yet this approach is useful in a way that Popper's is not because neither Bookman nor McIlwain make claims to represent the sole useful way of interpreting Plato, and both are aware of the

questions. See The Growth of Political Thought in the West (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1932), especially, pp. 1, 22.

²³ McIlwain does provide a brief biography of Plato, but does so more with the intention of providing a history of political thinkers, than with the intention of applying this background to his interpretation.

²⁴ McIlwain's view of a development of thought may involve some linking of arguments anachronistically, but not in the sense of labeling Plato with a 20th Century term.

limitations to their argument, at least to some extent. As such, one need to accept their view of the continuity of political questions to make use of their approach.

c) Commonality of Political Experience. The third type of "enduring element" in politics differs significantly from the other two in that it suggests that political experiences, and not political ideas, are what form the basis of comparison between thinkers of different ages. A writer who uses this approach need that hold that the political experience of the Greeks is irrelevant to an understanding or appreciation of Plato, but merely that Plato's environment was sufficiently similar to our own that one need not examine that environment in depth to learn how his message can be applied to our own experiences. This type of approach can be seen explicitly in the writing of Prosser Hall Frye, Roger Chance and Mulford Q. Sibley, and implicitly in the writing of G. Lowes Dickinson.

What is this approach saying? Here again, the specific sorts of elements in the political experience each writer refers to need not be examined. The important assumption each of these writers make is that some elements of the political environment are important enough to form a basis of comparison between different ages, even though other aspects of the political experience may differ a great deal. Moreover, these writers assume that our understanding of the past need not be systematic -- that we do not have to draw lines of continuity in thought to make sense of political ideas. Finally, these writers assume that what makes a political question important is the fact that it interests us, and not that it has objectively divided political thought or has persistently interested thinkers across the ages..

What does this approach imply? None of the writers who argue that a commonality of experience provides a basis of comparison between Plato's thought and our own maintain that this is the only way in which we can hope to make such a comparison.²⁵ It is helpful, however, to examine what such an extreme position would imply, so that one can assess what it means to combine this approach with elements of either or both of the last two.

If one maintains that a commonality of experience is the only basis of comparison between our views and Plato's, one is suggesting that the body of political ideas is not coherent enough to allow for such a comparison. The implications of this position entails some of the implications of each of the approaches discussed thus far. Like the arguments of Popper, Bookman and McIlwain, this position suggests that we can rightly interpret Plato's ideas without more than a cursory reference to the times in which he lived. Like Win-spear's approach, this position suggests that the ideas of the past need not be influential on later generations, and that the ideas which are appropriate may change over time. Like Fite and Chapman's argument, this position implies that one ought to assess a thinker's ideas to determine whether they are sufficiently insightful to help us, and suggests that certain thinkers may not be worth studying, while others may be useful. Thus, if one suggests that the ideas of the past are not related coherently, one implies that stray ideas may be important, but only when they seem useful.

Similarly, this position allows for the possibility that politics, itself, is a fairly incoherent, and incredibly complex process, which can only be identified by the activities which characterize it. This position accepts that neither the answers thinkers have given, nor

²⁵ See Bibliographic Essay.

even the questions thinkers have raised, help us to understand what politics itself is. Under such a perspective, we can, at best, only hope to make sense of our immediate problems, and not to understand the system in which our action takes place.

How useful is this approach? This position is the most flexible of the three just discussed in helping us to analyze the way in which political ideas have differed over time. The differences this approach tends to overlook are those between our political experience and the Greek polis. Yet, used alone, this approach is very unsatisfying to one who holds my perspective, for it helps us to understand only a small part of our political experience. I have tried to suggest, that if one holds, as I do, that politics is somewhat coherent, and that ideas underlie political action,²⁶ we cannot look at politics in this way alone. We must either do as the writers mentioned here do, and combine an argument that there is a commonality of political experience, with a perspective which suggests that ideas also make sense, or we must approach the past very differently.

Summary. I have just discussed three approaches which suggest that there is some enduring element in political ideas or the political experience which can be used as a basis of comparison between Plato's thought and our own. I have suggested that each of these approaches illuminates a part of what we would like to know about politics, but that none of these are complete in themselves. In the last part of this section, I will discuss some analysts who try to make use of the past in a different way.

²⁶If one is a strict empiricist, the idea that political thought has not been very coherent is not much of a problem. None of the analysts mentioned here, however, approach politics this way. See discussion in Chapter Five.

3) Relating More Subjective Impressions. It is possible to agree with Winspear to a point, and yet disagree with his conclusions. Several analysts have argued that to understand Plato, we must understand his times, and yet have tried to extract useful messages from Plato's writing. One way of doing this has been to attempt to judge Plato by the standards of his own time, and not by our standards. A second approach has been to use Plato's environment to help illuminate what he "really meant" and then compare his meaning to our own ideas. Both of these will be discussed, in turn.

a) Evaluating Plato by the Standards of His Time. Writers who use this approach create an analogy. These suggest that, if we can learn how Plato's thought was related to the thought of his time, we can understand what a thinker like Plato might look like in our environment. Examples of this sort of position can be seen in the writing of Eric Havelock, G. C. Field, and Werner Jaeger.

What is this approach saying? Analysts who approach Plato this way suggest that we can learn what Plato meant by examining his environment, or at least that an insight into Plato's environment is more helpful than harmful in understanding his meaning, and comparing his belief to our own.²⁷ Moreover, these analysts assume that the relationship between a thinker and his political environment corresponds to a relationship we can recognize. Finally, they assume, in contrast to Popper, that a principle or policy advocated in Plato's environment, did not necessarily mean the same then, that it does today.

²⁷Each of these writers holds different positions on what type of evidence ought to be accepted as an insight into Plato's motives, and how far one can rightly go in inferring Plato's disposition into his writing. See Bibliographic Essay.

What does this approach imply? This position implies a great deal about our view of the past. It suggests that the things a writer tried to achieve limits the extent to which we can use his argument. Accordingly, if Plato did not intend to make a statement about obligation, it is incorrect, and inappropriate to attempt to infer what his statement on the subject might be. This approach puts some sort of value on knowing what kind of person Plato was. If Plato were an unscrupulous politician, or an indigent, he should be understood differently than he is now, given what we know of his background. This idea of understanding Plato in light of what we know about him is similar, although not quite so systematic, as the type of interpretation suggested by Winspear. (see note 27). Finally, while this view tends to suggest that we ought not to judge the past by our standards, it does may a definite statement about what sorts of ideas are useful. The ideas which are useful are those which are interpreted as accurately as possible, and not those which are extrapolated from the writing of the past.

This position implies somewhat less about how one might view politics. The type of view is seems to suggest is one which likens the study of political ideas, to the study of history, or perhaps cultural anthropology.²⁸ It does not suggest, as Winspear's approach does, that political thought has followed a specific line of development, but merely that the thought of one time has been related to another. This position implies that ideas are not just useful in and of themselves, but that they become useful when we can know where, historically, these ideas came from.-- Much the way one might suggest that it is useful to know exactly what happened in the Peloponnesian War if we are to understand military history.

²⁸This is especially true of Jaeger, See Bibliographic essay.

How useful is this approach? The analysts who argue in this way tradeoff in the opposite direction from those who seek to make comparisons on the basis of "enduring elements"; writers who seek to be faithful to Plato's intentions must, of necessity, be less than faithful to modern concerns. Moreover, even the attempt to interpret accurately is doomed to a certain amount of failure. Each of these analysts has preconceived notions of what thought is important to look for when examining Plato, and each must base an interpretation on evidence which is inevitably spotty.

Yet, one must not equate faithfulness to our modern concerns with "usefulness." While it may be useful to attempt to extract a wide range of ideas from Plato, even from misconceptions of what he said, there are some ideas which we will only learn if we attempt to be faithful to Plato's intentions. We gain a different insight into what it means to suggest that poets ought to be censored, for example, when we try to discover why Plato made that suggestion.²⁹ The attempt to be accurate may provide a different insight, even if that attempt can never succeed perfectly. Here again, the primary question is whether one approach precludes us from taking advantage of others.

b) Evaluating by Our Standards. Analysts who use this approach attempt to combine elements of other approaches. Like the approach just discussed, this position involves an examination of the thinker's environment to try to find out as much about what he/she meant as possible. Like the approaches involving "enduring elements," this position suggests that we cannot free ourselves from our preconceived notions about what is correct in politics. As a result, these wri-

²⁹ Compare, for example, Havelock's argument on this point with Popper's or Bertrand Russell's. See Bibliographic Essay.

ters argue that we must evaluate the thinker by what we believe to be correct. Examples of this sort of argument can be seen in works by Alvin Gouldner, Ernest Barker and others.

What is this approach saying? Gouldner and Barker, like the analysts who use the previous approach, assume that it is more helpful than harmful to interpret a thinker by examining the environment in which he/she wrote. Where these analysts differ is in assuming that Plato can rightly be assessed by relating his views to our own, and in assuming that the important political questions are those we believe to be important. These assumptions resemble those made by Bookman, McIlwain, Frye and Chance.

What does this view imply? Not surprisingly, the view of the past implied by this position is quite complex. Gouldner and Barker suggest that learning about a thinker's environment helps us to understand what his/her ideas meant, but does not justify a thinker for having certain ideas. If Plato was an apologist for slavery, he was "wrong," even if we know why it was that he did not argue otherwise. Since these writers suggest that our standards are already adequate, they imply that what we can learn from the past are not "new ideas," but rather insights into why thinker's held ideas which were inadequate. It is important, therefore, to determine whether an idea of the past is adequate or not.

The view of politics this implies is a fairly simple one. We know, to a large extent, what the correct understandings about politics are, but can gain from finding out why people have held differently. The fact that individuals have held differently is, in Gouldner's words "discomfitting,"³⁰ but we must not try to apologize for ideas we disagree with. The way to the "good life" is in understanding why we hold the ideas we do.

How useful is this approach? This position has some of the advantages and some of the limitations of other approaches discussed. It helps to provide an insight into why Plato held the views he did, and also allows use to extrapolate a bit to view Plato in ways which seem appropriate to us. On the other hand, it limits the way in which the past can be used, and neglects the possibility that Plato's thought may not be entirely comparable to our own. Moreover, Gouldner and Barker seem more concerned with judging Plato, than with applying Plato's ideas to our own problems. Thus, while their approach is interesting, and perhaps uniquely useful in gaining certain insights which no one other approach provides, it is also unusually limited.

Summary. In this section, I have discussed various ways in which writers have approached the problem of stemming the gap of time between Plato's environment and our own. Specifically, I have discussed Alban Dewes Winspear's argument that the ideas of different times cannot be compared, three different approaches which suggest that such a comparison can be made on the basis of certain "enduring elements" in politics, and two approaches which suggest that one can take time into account in interpreting and evaluating the views of the past. What I have tried to make clear are two points: first, that the way we view the past means something -- that the assumptions we make when we approach Plato affect the conclusions we reach about politics; and, second, that every approach to the past is made at a cost, and that the most adequate approaches are those that recognize that cost, and allow for the possibility that other approaches may be useful. The second section of this chapter will discuss a somewhat different problem which arises in comparing Plato's ideas to our own.

³⁰see Bibliographic Essay.

Section Two: Plato and Politics

Time is not the only possible barrier between our political questions and Plato's assistance in answering them. Some analysts have suggests that, while we may be able to compare the thought of the past to our own, the extent to which we can extract a useable statement about politics from Plato's dialogues is limited. This argument has generally taken one of two, somewhat related, forms. The first is the view that the use we can make of Plato's thought to help us in politics is limited because Plato was not a political thinker at all. The second is the view that the use we can make of Plato is limited because Plato's view of politics is fundamentally different from ours. These will be discussed separately.

1) Plato as an Apolitical Thinker. This argument has been made in a fairly extreme form by F. E. Sparshott and Sheldon Wolin, and somewhat less vehemently by Ernest Barker and Wayne A. R. Leys. Several other writers have hinted at this sort of argument.³¹ Here again, it is useful to begin with a description of what this position entails.

What does this position entail? All of the writers mentioned above are concerned with defining the discipline of "politics." They suggest that "politics" should be understood as the study of how society comes to find compromises among conflicting viewpoints where an appeal to knowledge is not possible -- where no viewpoint is "truer" than another. They go on to argue that Plato, rather than helping us to understand how these compromises take place, tried to eliminate compromise and conflict altogether, and, as such was "a-" or "anti-political."

³¹Roger Chance, I. M. Crombie, Alvin Gouldner and others make references to this sort of view. (See Bibliographic Essay.)

All of these writers make an assumption about knowledge -- that there are, indeed, decisions which cannot be based upon knowledge, and that it is useful to have a discipline to deal with these issues. Moreover, each makes an assumption about what constitutes "political thought." Each of these analysts, with the exception of Sparshott, assume that a "political thinker" is one who helps to describe "politics," as opposed to one who helps us to act in politics. Sparshott goes even further to assume that it is only those thinkers who describe politics who can possibly help us to act in politics. Finally, each assume, or perhaps more accurately, interpret Plato to argue that "politics" ought to be eliminated.

To understand what these assumptions mean, it is helpful to examine the basis on which each of them might be disagreed with. First, one might have a conflicting view of knowledge. One might believe that all decisions can, indeed, be based upon knowledge, and that knowledge ought to order political decisions. This view has been expressed by Leo Strauss and others.

Second, one might differ with the view of "political thought." One might suggest, as Popper, Winterspear, Fite and others have, that a thinker ought to be called "political" if that individual acts in politics, or makes arguments which have implications on how we might act in politics. One might also suggest, as John Wild, and some analysts of American politics have,³² that much of what could be called "political thought" involves attempts to avoid conflict. These analysts argue that it is not very useful to consider all theory which strives toward conciliation, as well as much of natural law theory to be "apolitical."

³²Most importantly Daniel Boorstin and Louis Hartz.

Finally, one might disagree with the interpretation of Plato. Glenn R. Morrow argues, for example, that the Laws was an attempt at a mixed constitution -- one which balances the interests of various classes against each other.³³ Allan Bloom and others have argued that Plato presented a view of conflict when he depicted the philosopher's return to the cave in the Republic.³⁴ Both of these suggest that Plato might well be called a "political" thinker.

What are the implications of this position? Each of these opposing assumptions are helpful in illuminating implications about the view of Plato as an "apolitical" thinker. First, the view of knowledge suggests that there are real limits to what we can know about the correct way to act. All the analysts who make this argument suggest that politics cannot be ordered so as to achieve "perfection." Second, the assumption about "political thought" suggests that the applicability of a thinker's ideas to our problems is limited if he did not describe or analyze conflict. Sparshott implies that a thinker who attempts to transcend conflict is of no use to us at all in politics -- that it is not helpful to see what it is to have a "vision" of a perfect system. The other analysts, especially Wolin, suggest that an "apolitical view" may still have political implications. Finally, the interpretation of Plato suggests that our application of the past must be selective, based on the way in which we interpret each thinker's ideas; to these analysts Plato is not as useful as some other thinkers -- such as Aristotle -- might be.

³³See Bibliographic Essay.

³⁴This is not to suggest that Bloom would agree with the view that politics ought to be defined as the study of conflict. I am using Bloom merely as an example of how one might construct a case for the argument that Plato tried to analyze conflict.

How useful is this position? As with the approaches of Chapman, Fite and Winspear, my difficulty with this argument comes over its basic assumptions. Specifically, I take exception to the assumption about what ought to constitute "political thought." I believe that, while it may be appropriate to think of "politics" as the study of the way in which questions of value, as opposed to questions of "fact" are disposed of, individual action in politics involves a certain sort of knowledge. The knowledge which is important is knowledge of why we look at politics in the way we do, and not necessarily why politics takes place in the way it does. I do not believe that it is very useful to think of all writers who sought to avoid conflict -- not only Plato, but also Locke, Rousseau, and even Marx, in his vision of the communist state -- as "apolitical."

Yet, like Winspear's approach, this position is useful because it can help one to challenge one's assumptions. Sparshott, and especially Wolin, force us to decide how we are to look at politics, and to begin determining what views can possibly help us to act politically. It is important to delimit the field that one is discussing, and these analysts are useful for helping us to do that.

2) Plato and a Different Concept of Politics. Another perspective, best associated with David Grene, examines Plato's idea of "politics" and reaches a conclusion which Gouldner did not -- that Plato's conception cannot be compared to our own. Grene's view of what our conception of politics is, however, differs a great deal from Sparshott's or Wolin's.

What is this position saying? Grene argues that to understand Plato's political views we must recognize that they were presented as

a part of a unified philosophic whole, and that we cannot take Plato's political ideas out of context. Since we tend to think of politics as, at least to some extent, analytically distinct from other fields, we cannot possibly compare Plato's ideas to our own.

Greene does not make an assumption about the "true" nature of knowledge, but rather about the possibility that the field which we call "politics" may not be one which all thinkers have recognized. He assumes that we delimit this field according to the type of thinking which characterizes it, rather than the type of action which is associated with it. In this he differs from writers like Frye, Chance and Dickinson. He also assumes that we must be true to the context of a thinker's ideas -- in this he differs from all of the analysts who make use of "enduring elements." Finally, he makes a specific interpretation of Plato's thought -- one which differs from the interpretation writers like Sparshott and Wolin make.

What does this position imply? Like the arguments of Wolin and Sparshott, Greene's position implies that making use of the past requires that we first interpret accurately. Like Havelock, Field and Jaeger, Greene suggests that our use of a thinker is limited by what he/she had intended to say. Greene suggests that we cannot extract principles of politics, or specific policies, from a larger philosophic framework and make sense of what we find. Finally, Greene suggests that our notion of politics itself is somewhat arbitrary and subject to change -- that it is possible that our thought may not be useful at some later time.

How useful is this position? Greene's view, of course, limits the extent to which we can make use of the past, and even dis-

parages about what it is political analysis is trying to achieve. Yet, it is very useful as a reminder of another sort of difficulty we have when approaching Plato. Grene isolates a limitation which relatively few writers have been conscious of -- that thoughts have an analytical context as well as a social context, and that we do injustice to Plato when we try to extract ideas from the whole of his thought. While I believe that we may use Plato's ideas in some form, despite this difficulty, I also believe that it is important to recognize this problem.

Summary. In this section, I have presented a brief discussion of some analysts who question whether Plato presented his arguments in a form which we can use. Specifically, I have examined analysts who suggest that Plato is less than useful because he failed to present a view of "politics," and one analyst who suggests that Plato's argument was made in a context which is fundamentally different from our own. What I have tried to make clear, is that both these views suggest that the usefulness of a thinker depends on the way he is interpreted, and provide very specific ideas of what kind of knowledge we look for when we review Plato. I have also tried to suggest that, while I differ with some of the assumptions of these arguments, I believe that it is essential that one decide why one differs with these assumptions before one attempts to apply Plato's thought to our own political problems.

This chapter has been a review of how analysts have approached the problem of comparing Plato's ideas to our own. I have attempted to discover what it means to argue that such a comparison cannot be made, as well as what it means to suggest a basis for making such a comparison. The next chapter will discuss some of the conclusions analysts who make that comparison have reached about Plato.

CHAPTER FOUR: How Should We View Plato?

This chapter is different from the last. Chapter Three dealt with a question of method -- "how does one compare Plato's ideas to our own (if such a thing is possible)?" -- and a question of compromise -- "what costs is one willing to undergo to make that comparison?." This chapter deals with a question of ideology -- "what is at stake in viewing Plato a particular way?." The interpretation and evaluation of Plato has not just been a matter of a choice of analytical tools; it has been a real indication of how analysts have stood on pressing political issues. I will be examining three such issues of interpretation in depth: first, the view of Plato as a "totalitarian" (or a "democrat"), second, the view of Plato as a "natural law theorist," and finally, the more recent view of Plato as a "limits-to-growth theorist."

As a preface to what will be discussed here, a comment ought to be made about the relation between ideology and analysis. In a perfectly "calm" time, when no great political question presses for immediate consideration, it is relatively easy to write a detached and rigorous analysis of some political thinker of the past. Yet, when immediate answers are needed, and the stakes of making an accurate judgement are much higher, it is difficult to be so dispassionate. In general, the writers to be discussed in this chapter, and particularly those examined in the first section, are aware of the importance and immediacy of what they are deciding. To make sense of their arguments, and assess the significance of what they have written, one must understand the views of politics they feel need defending. In this chapter, I will examine how writers have used Plato to make an ideological argument, and what it has meant to view Plato in a particular way.

I have chosen three views which I believe to be both interesting and important, and which I believe illustrate three quite different ways in which Plato has been thought of. While there is some overlap, these three ways can generally be distinguished as follows: those who refer to Plato as a "totalitarian" or a "democrat" have tended to use Plato as a "symbol" for these modern abstractions; those who view Plato as a "natural law theorist" have tended to think of him as the head of a "tradition" of thought; those who think of Plato as a "limits-to-growth" theorist have tended to look to him as a source of "conventional wisdom." Each of these deserves separate consideration:

Section One: Plato as a "Totalitarian" (or a "Democrat")

The question of whether Plato should be called a "totalitarian" or a "democrat" is, perhaps, the best example of the three to be discussed of the way in which a dispute of interpretation can have a great deal of ideological significance. Examination of this dispute is useful not only because it has drawn the attention of a great many analysts, but also because it illustrates the problems that arise when analyses are closely tied to strong ideological positions. As I will explain, the two most important of these difficulties are that the analytical dispute tends to polarize into two camps with no middle ground, and that the analyses become useful only to those who share the ideological position of the analyst. My discussion in this section will be divided into four parts: In the first, I will provide an overview of the terms of the dispute; in the second, I will discuss why Plato has been called a "totalitarian"; in the third, I will examine why Plato has been called a

"democrat"; finally, I will provide a general conclusion about the ideological debate which has taken place.

a) What is this dispute about? It seems obvious to point out that one can argue that it is incorrect to call Plato a "totalitarian," or that a particular basis for doing so is incorrect, without asserting that Plato ought to be viewed as a "democrat." Yet this debate does not seem to allow for such a possibility. As the title of a book by Thomas Landon Thorson suggests, it is simply a question of "Plato: Totalitarian or Democrat?" with no middle ground.

It is particularly ironic then, that in a debate where the sides are so clear cut, the issue itself should be somewhat unclear. While both sides would agree that "totalitarianism" refers generally to some sort of repressive regime which employs brute force to exercise the interests of the state with little concern for the individual, neither make the effort to define the term more specifically. This may well be because, during the late 1930's and 1940's the definition of "totalitarianism" seemed obvious, and not worth discussing. Yet, I believe that a good deal of the difference of opinion between the two sides over what causes totalitarianism stems from a difference of perception about what constitutes totalitarianism. To understand this difference, it is helpful to examine each position in depth.

b) Why a totalitarian? Writers who have thought of Plato as a totalitarian have argued in one, or both, of two ways: they have either argued that Plato held general understandings about the way politics ought to work which have led historically, or tends to lead, analytically, to a totalitarian way of thinking, or that Plato proposed certain government changes which resemble those we may associate

with totalitarianism. These will be referred to respectively as "totalitarian by principle" and "totalitarian by policy" and will be discussed, in turn.

Totalitarian by principle. Writers like Renford Bambrough, Thomas Landon Thorson and R. F. Alfred Hoernlé argue that it is inaccurate to call Plato a "totalitarian" merely on the policies which he advocated. This is because they believe that these policies have an analytical context. Plato believed in the existence of true principles which ought to govern politics, and it is this belief which led him to the conclusion that freedom lies in condemning all other opinions as false. Thus, when we understand why Plato suggested this policy, we can realize that he had as much appreciation for the need for freedom as we do. On the other hand, these writers argue that Plato's metaphysical position itself is inexorably linked to totalitarianism. They suggest that the belief in the existence of true principles inevitably leads one to argue for the repression of other opinions through totalitarian methods. Accordingly, they conclude that Plato ought to be called a "totalitarian."

This argument has three implications which I believe are important to note. The first is that a belief in totalitarianism may stem from a misguided notion of what constitutes freedom -- i.e. that a writer who believes in the importance of "freedom" may rightly be called a totalitarian because he/she misunderstands what freedom consists of. This, in turn, suggests that some notions of "freedom" are, objectively, freer than others.

The second implication is that one need not consider what principles a writer holds to be true to determine whether he/she should rightly be called a "totalitarian." Hitler's goals may be less

laudatory than Plato's, but it is the belief in absolute principles itself, and not the nature of those principles, which leads one to advocate and justify repression by the state.

Finally, this view also implies its contrapositive -- that any belief which is not totalitarian must not rest on an argument for the existence of absolute principles. Thus, if Locke is not a totalitarian, then either his conception of "natural law" does not constitute a belief in absolute principles, or he greatly misunderstood the implications of his argument.

Totalitarian by Policy. Bertrand Russell argues that we can see that Plato was a totalitarian just by looking at the policies he suggested. Among other things, Russell points to Plato's support for a "governmental prerogative of lying," and the enforcement of inequality of privilege and position. Russell makes no attempt to discover what the "analytical context" of these policies may have been, and thus, tacitly rejects the initial argument of the writers just discussed. If taken to an extreme,³⁵ Russell's view implies that the principles a writer believes to be important, or the fact that a writer believes in principles at all, is irrelevant to an evaluation of the writer's approach to politics.

Like the "totalitarian by principle" argument, this view suggests that "freedom" and "repression" have objective meanings, and that policies which stem from a misguided notion of freedom are rightly called "totalitarian." Unlike the last argument, however, this

³⁵It is difficult to say how much ought to be imputed based on Russell's omission. I am examining an extreme form of this view not only because it shows what this approach leads to, but also because it reflects the way people view "totalitarianism" quite frequently. Declarations on human rights generally proscribe policy not principles. I apologize for any injustice done to Russell in this effort.

view makes it impossible to determine that a writer was inconsistent. Locke may be called a "democrat" or a "totalitarian" without reference to anything his principles may suggest. Finally, this view does not admit of the possibility of devising policies which appear to be "repressive" out of a greater scheme to achieve liberty. Thus, Rousseau's rhetoric about freedom, and Machiavelli's arguments for the need to "economize on violence" should not affect the way we evaluate the policies these writers proposed.

Totalitarian by both principle and policy. Karl Popper and R. H. S. Crossman argue that Plato's theoretical approach to politics represents a totalitarian way of thinking, and that this is evidenced by the fact that the policies he proposed are, objectively, totalitarian. These writers suggest that we can identify totalitarianism either by examining principles or policies, and that each of the two is, by itself, indicative of totalitarianism.

The view this implies of theoretical analysis is similar to the view Gouldner and Barker's approach implies about historical analysis. Popper and Crossman suggest that ideas determine and help explain action, but do not justify action. According to this view, we can know what policies are, objectively, totalitarian, and also know what principles, objectively, lead one to advocate these policies. While the nature of the principles may help to determine how brutal the repression advocated is, it is the belief in principles which are true, and which should order politics which leads to repression.³⁶ Finally, the ease with which one can make the determination that a writer was a totalitarian suggests that few writers have historically been inconsistent or ambivalent on this point.

³⁶Popper specifies that it is especially "historicism" and "tribalism" which lead to totalitarian policies. See Bibliographic Essay, for the distinction between his view and Crossman's.

All three of these approaches agree on one major point -- that Plato must be examined as a prime example of what to avoid. For those who call him a "totalitarian by principle," what must be avoided is "vision" -- a belief that politics can and should be based upon absolute, true principles of order. For Russell, who calls Plato a "totalitarian by policy," we must avoid repressive measures, and it matters little on what basis these measures are avoided. For Popper and Crossman, we must avoid either, and both of these, because one implies the other. Ironically, all these writers suggest that a political system which will tolerate differences of opinion, but be intolerant to some sorts of views.³⁷

All of these analysts use Plato as a symbol of the evil of totalitarianism. For each of them, it has become almost as important to defeat Plato analytically as it is to defeat the forces of repression in our modern political lives. This is why the "totalitarian" or "democrat" debate is more significant than just an effort to make a definitive judgement about a writer who died almost 2500 years ago. This is also why these arguments seem less than useful to those of us who are not part of this debate. Just as our interpretation of western movies would be significantly different if we believed that black hats symbolized the "good guys," our understanding and application of the Plato as a "totalitarian" argument depends on our agreement on what the symbol of Plato means. I will now discuss some analysts who interpret the symbol of Plato quite differently.

c) Why a democrat? Given the nature of this dispute discussed earlier, to argue that Plato ought not to be called a "totalitarian" has become equivalent to arguing that he ought to be called a "demo-

³⁷For an interesting view on this point, see John G. Gunnell, Political Theory: Tradition and Interpretation (Cambridge; Mass.: Winthrop Publishers, Inc., 1979), p. 160.

crat." To maintain what I believe to be an important analytical distinction, however, I will refer to the responses to arguments which link Plato to "totalitarianism" as, "not totalitarian by principle," and "not totalitarian by policy."

Not totalitarian by principle. The analysts who make this argument agree with those who argue that Plato is a "totalitarian by principle" that it is incorrect to take Plato's policies out of their analytical context.³⁸ These two schools of thought also agree that Plato believed that politics ought to be ordered according to true principles. Where the analysts to be discussed here disagree with the others is on the question of what view of politics is implied by Plato's principles. This argument has taken two forms.

The first is the suggestion of Robert William Hall, and others, that Plato's concept of freedom is correct -- that freedom does consist in the striving of individuals to achieve as much of perfection as they are capable of. Hall argues that the view of freedom as a limitation of incursion into the activities of individuals is actually more restricted than Plato's concept.

The second is the view of Leo Strauss, John Hallowell, H. B. Acton, and others, that what actually leads to totalitarianism is not the belief in principles, but the failure to recognize that certain principles -- such as claims of individual rights -- ought to transcend political expediency. These writers argue that when a state fails to recognize and honor higher moral claims, it has no rightful basis of authority, and must employ brute force to exercise its will.

³⁸See especially, the argument of Eric Unger, "Contemporary Anti-Platonism," in Renford Bambrough, ed., Plato, Popper and Politics, (Cambridge, England: W. Heffer & Sons, Lmt., 1967), pp. 91-107. cf. J. N. Findlay, Plato, the Written and Unwritten Doctrines (New York:

Both these arguments, like the argument they oppose, suggest that we can have an objective understanding of what constitutes freedom and of what types of thought lead to totalitarianism. Unlike the opposing argument, however, these positions involve a concern for what sorts of principles a writer holds. The contrapositive implied by these views suggests that any thinker who is considered a "totalitarian" must not have a belief in the "right" moral principles. This means that, if we want to call Marx, Lenin or Gentile a totalitarian thinker, or place that label, as at least one writer has done,³⁹ on the Catholic Church, we must demonstrate these these individuals/group held that no moral principles should influence the governance of the political order, or that the moral principles they recognized were "wrong" ones.

Not totalitarian by policy. This argument, like the last, has generally take one of two forms. The first is to question the basic assumption that Plato's ideas can accurately be judged by examining his policies alone. These include analysts who suggest that Plato's ideas have an analytical context, or a historical context which, when understood, suggest that Russell's description is inaccurate. Evidence for this sort of view of Plato's circumstances, can be seen in the arguments of Jaeger and Havelock discussed earlier.

The second form of this argument has been to suggest that Russell and Popper misread Plato. This arguman may or may not be tied to an implicit assumption that Plato can accurately be judged by his policies alone. Perhaps the most extensive of these arguments is made by Ronald Levinson, who sets out specifically to "defend" Plato against virtually all of the charges raised against him.

Humanities Press, 1974), especially pp. ix-x, xiii.

³⁹Renford Bambrough. See Bibliographic Essay.

The implications of the first argument have already been discussed and need not be elaborated on further. The most important implication of the second argument is that it has virtually no implications at all, except to suggest that some interpretations of Plato are not as accurate as others. Levinson, especially, is more concerned with discussing why other views of Plato are faulty, than he is with making a statement about how one should go about interpreting Plato.

What these two responses to the "Plato as a totalitarian" position suggest is that the "totalitarian" or "democrat" dispute is, in large measure, a battle over interpretation.⁴⁰ The two sides seem to disagree over what a belief in absolute principles implies, and how Plato is to be understood. Yet, behind this battle is a question of what leads one to interpret Plato in a certain way.

d) What is behind this debate? From the ongoing analysis, two general statements can be made about the disagreement between the "totalitarian" and "democrat" positions: first, that the dispute rests on an unstated disagreement over what "totalitarianism" entails, and second, that the most important aspect about the debate is not the insight it gives into Plato, but rather the way it illuminates two important ideological positions. These will be discussed, in turn.

As I mentioned earlier, all the writers on this subject would agree on some general definition about totalitarianism, but none provide a specific definition about what they are referring to. What I have tried to suggest is that the two sides are not really examining the same thing when they talk about "totalitarianism." Popper, Crossman, Thorson and to some extent Russell think of

⁴⁰It should be mentioned that I have deliberately avoided going into depth on what is, to some extent, an important subgroup among

"totalitarianism" primarily as a system which does not allow for dissent, and associate the idea of liberal-democracy with the recognition that differing opinions must be tolerated. This leads all these writers, with the exception of Russell, to ask the question, "what view of politics would lead one to be intolerant of dissent?." The answer they reach is that one would be intolerant if one believed that one could know what the correct answers are -- i.e. if one felt that there were knowable true principles which order the universe. They conclude that, since Plato believed in such principles, he must be a "totalitarian."

Writers like Hallowell and Acton, on the other hand, think of "totalitarianism" primarily as a system where rule is established by brute force as opposed to liberal-democracy, where rule is established by legitimate authority. As a result, they ask the question, "what view of politics would lead one to advocate a rule by force as opposed to authority?." The answer they reach is that one would advocate such a rule if one fails to recognize that there exists some principle that is "above" the state which makes authority legitimate. They conclude that, since Plato recognized that principles were higher than the state, Plato cannot be called a "totalitarian."

This debate would seem like little more than a discussion over semantics, if it were not important for revealing these two basically contrasting views of freedom. Those who believe that Plato is a totalitarian argue that a "vision" of transcendent principles is repugnant to freedom, and counterproductive to our action in a "free" society. Those who argue against this position argue that such a "vision" is essential to the realization of freedom, and necessary

the "Plato as a democrat" position -- those who link Plato to a tradition of "natural law." I will be discussing these writers in depth in the next section of this chapter. For the most part, this genera-

if we are to know how to act. The former position suggests that the best way to approach politics is to search for heuristic devices or scientific laws which help explain action, and avoid an appeal to value-laden principles. The latter suggests that we must avoid using the tools of the natural sciences to explain the social sciences, and look towards the principles which help us to make sense of our action.

Conclusion. It is now possible to understand the difficulties of using Plato as a symbol for an ideological position. When ideologies are particularly strong, as in this case, the debate over interpretation tends to polarize into two camps, and the middle ground disappears. Yet, ironically, the use of a symbol, as opposed to a literal definition of the argument being made, obscures the terms of the debate. This shifts the focus of the debate to a disagreement over the correct interpretation of the symbol being used, and makes it more difficult to see the real confrontation taking place. This is especially true because the type of ideological debate that would lead one to use Plato as a symbol, would also lead one to be less sensitive to the limits and difficulties of applying such an argument. One would not expect Popper to conclude his argument with an explanation of the difficulties of looking at Plato as an abstraction -- it would destroy the power of the argument

As a result, unless one agrees with the ideology of the analyst one is unlike to make use of the argument being made. It is difficult to see where Popper's views might challenge one's own. Yet this use of Plato, for all its difficulties, is important to examine. This is because it helps to demonstrate how analysis of Plato can used to express an immediate and important ideological position, lization fits their analysis, as well.

and because it helps to provide an insight into what these ideological positions are. This latter point can be better understood by examining a related facet of the analysis of Plato -- the view of Plato as a "natural law theorist."

Section Two: Plato as a "Natural Law Theorist"

If one takes the position that the ideas of the past have formed some sort of coherent structure, it seems only natural to try to examine the ways in which various ideas have been related. It is because the categorizing of thinkers and their ideas is done so frequently in political analysis,⁴¹ that it is important to be aware of what it means to relate one thinker's ideas to another's. This section will be primarily concerned with the arguments of four analysts: Robert William Hall, Joseph Maguire, Leo Strauss (and his school) and John Wild. Each of these writers suggest that Plato ought to be thought of as part of a "tradition of natural law."⁴² I will be suggesting that looking upon Plato this way has real implications, not only on the way we understand Plato, but also on the way we view natural law, and that it may not be very useful to look upon natural law this way. My discussion will be divided into three parts: the first will examine what it means to link Plato to a "tradition"; the second will discuss what it means to suggest that Plato is part of the "natural law tradition"; the final part will provide a conclusion about the usefulness of looking at Plato this way.

a) What does it mean to link Plato to a "tradition?" The word "tradition" has commonly been used in either of two ways.⁴³ In

⁴¹Even I may have been guilty of such a thing from time to time.

⁴²Actually, Hall links Plato to what he calls the "tradition of individualism," but his argument is quite similar to the others.

⁴³For a more thorough presentation of this distinction, see Gunnell, pp. 66-88.

one usage, it denotes a "commonality of viewpoint" -- e.g. a writer who argues that we need to protect the rights of individuals against the will of the majority, may be said to be representative of the "tradition" of liberal thought. This is the way Maguire and Hall use the term. The other usage refers to an evolving, or perhaps, degenerating, process of political discussion through the ages -- a "great dialogue" to which all the thinkers of the past contributed. This is the way Strauss and Wild use the term. "Tradition" in the former sense refers to an analytical category, and does not necessarily suggest that thinkers knew they were part of a "tradition" at the time they wrote. "Tradition" in the latter sense a discussion which has been consciously perpetuated by thinkers up until the present day.⁴⁴ These will be briefly examined, in turn.

Tradition by commonality. Hall defines "individualism" in such a way that it relates his interpretation of Plato to a general view of the merit of the individual that one might associate with liberal-democracy. Maguire defines "natural law theory" as a belief that there are principles which transcend the political process. To argue that Plato shares these views with others, is to suggest that the similarity between Plato's argument and that of other thinkers in the "tradition" is more important than the difference. In Maguire's argument, for example, this suggests that it is more accurate and useful to think of Plato and Bentham as related, because they both rely on the existence of principles, than it is to suggest that Plato's principles differ so significantly from Bentham's that the two are not easily compared.⁴⁵

⁴⁴See Ibid. It seems possible to use "tradition" in both senses -- e.g. to say that Lock advanced the "tradition" of liberal thinking to a higher stage by using ideas of "natural rights" to respond to Filmer's concept of the divine right of kings. None of the writers discussed here, however, seem to use the term this way.

It is useful to see what views are rejected when one tries to find where Plato "fits" in relation to other theorists. One such view is that a thinker must be understood on his/her own terms, and not in relation to a "type of thinking." One might suggest that such a broad category misses the important differences between thinkers. Alternatively, one might argue, as Quentin Skinner has, that there are important political implications that stem from relatively minor differences in viewpoints, and that it makes little sense to think of politics in terms of broad similarities.⁴⁶ Finally, one might suggest that attempting to categorize Plato limits his applicability to a wide range of viewpoints by implying that one cannot look to Plato to find the source of arguments which have been used to oppose a particular tradition -- such as natural law.⁴⁷

Tradition of the "great dialogue." Strauss suggests that the history of political theory can rightly be understood as a continual departure from Plato's view that politics is based on correct principles which exist in nature. Wild argues that the history of political theory can be characterized by the combination of other principles with Plato's; he suggests that Plato's view of "natural law" regained influence in the writing of Paine, and has been a part of American political thought every since. Both these views suggest that all of political thought can be understood in its relation to Plato, and to Plato's view of "natural law." This suggests that all theorists either accepted or rejected "natural law," and that no thinker can

⁴⁵Maguire considers "utilitarianism" to be a principle which fits his definition. See Bibliographic Essay.

⁴⁶See "meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," History and Theory (VIII,1), 1969, especially p. 52.

⁴⁷Here again, it is possible to suggest that Plato is at the root

be evaluated without assessing his/her contribution to the debate on "natural law." Thus, unlike the other view of "tradition," this usage is geared toward characterizing the disagreement between thinkers.

Like the other view, however, this usage has met with a good deal of criticism, particularly from John G. Gunnell.⁴⁸ Gunnell questions the existence of a "great dialogue," and suggests that the particular circumstances under which thinkers wrote, and their own disposition at the time they wrote, were far more important influences on their thought than any grand view of their place in an ongoing discussion. Gunnell also argues that approaching the past this way distorts the importance of one particular aspect of theory. Finally, he suggests that placing Plato at the head of this "tradition" runs the risk of equating "political theorists" with "philosophers," and so misunderstanding what they were attempting to achieve.

In short, both views of tradition suggest that theory over time can be compared, and that writers are best interpreted and evaluated in their relation to other writers. Moreover, both have implications not only for how we view Plato, but also for how we view the thinkers who followed him, and the issues which these thinkers discussed. To suggest that there is a "tradition" of thought is to suggest more than a similarity between views; it is to imply that a certain important concept of our political theory has been understood to refer to the same thing since Plato's time. I will now discuss what it means to look at "natural law" in this way.

of quite a few traditions, and even two or more conflicting traditions. This, however, would blurr the distinction between competing traditions and make the concept less useful. None of the analysts discussed here argue in this way.

⁴⁸Gunnell, esp. pp. 84-86, 137-138.

b) What does it mean to suggest that Plato is part of a "natural law tradition?" Plato used the term nomos tēs physeos only once; Callicles distinguished the "law of nature" that "might makes right" from the artificial laws that the weak try to impose on the strong.⁴⁹ When Plato spoke of an "individual," he used the word idiotēs -- a term which carried the connotation of privatism and even of a foolish desire to separate from society.⁵⁰ Clearly, an attempt to associate Plato with the tradition of "natural law" and "individualism" requires that one read something into Plato; more importantly, it requires that one read something into these two concepts.

All four of the analysts discussed define the terms they examine as involving some sort of belief in the existence of higher principles which transcend the empirical world. Beyond that, they divide into two different definitions. The definition Strauss and Wild provide of "natural law," and the definition Hall provides of "individualism," involve an understanding that, while external principles do not inevitably determine our action, these principles are "good," such that we "ought" to arrange our practices and conventions to conform with these principles as much as possible. Maguire's definition (see p. 57) is much broader; he suggests that "natural law" describes any theory which "posits a universally acceptable criterion, and a source of moral validity of positive law and positive morality independent of the legislator and independent of society."⁵¹

⁴⁹Gorgias 483E, see Joseph P. Maguire, "Plato's theory of Natural Law," in Alfred R. Bellinger, ed., Yale Classical Studies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), v. 10, p. 151n.

⁵⁰See Werner Jaeger, Paideia, 2nd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), v. 1, p. 444, n. 45. Idiotēs is the root for words like "idiom," "idiosyncratic," and "idiotic."

⁵¹Maguire, p. 151. This applies even to "subjective" criteria.

To determine what each of these two views mean, I will discuss each with reference to three questions: 1) what is this view saying?; 2) what theorists would be called "natural law theorists" by this definition? 3) what are the implications of thinking of "natural law" in this way?.

Strauss, Wild and Hall and the "good" principles. To understand what this view is saying, it is helpful to analyze it in light of what it is not saying. All three of these analysts think of the concepts they describe (which, for the sake of convenience will both be referred to as "natural law") as being rather specific. First, they define nature law as something which can only be good -- i.e. that nature is not something which we are here to overcome. Second, they believe that natural law is always consonant with the true higher aspirations of each human being -- i.e. that "natural law" is not in conflict with the "real" interests of any individual. Third, they suggest that customs and conventions in poorly ordered societies may not reflect the "natural law" -- i.e. that natural law is not irresistible, and that ordering a society according to natural law (as much as such a thing is possible) requires some effort. Finally, they suggest that, while natural law can be used as a standard to judge action, the claim that natural law makes on us derives only from the fact that it is "good" in a normative sense⁵² i.e. that "reason" tells us that we ought to follow the natural law, because "reason" shows us that the natural law is the perfect way in which existence can be ordered.

⁵² See John Wild, Plato's Modern Enemies and the Theory of Natural Law (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 81-85, 116-117, Leo Strauss, Natural Right and History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 126-127, 139, and Robert William Hall, Plato and the Individual (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), pp. 17-18, 216 for statements of this argument.

The last aspect of the definition is particularly important because it differs from the way the term "natural law" is often used.⁵³ According to this definition, "natural law" is prescriptive only in the sense that it "defines what is good for us." It is our "reason" and not the law itself which direct us to act. Moreover, the "law" is not proscriptive in the sense that it tells individuals or governments that "thou shalt not" do something. This law does not stem from a view that individuals are estranged from society, or that individuals are in need of protection.⁵⁴ It does not involve what Sabine has called a "claim to an inherent right to have one's personality respected."⁵⁵

Under this definition of "natural law," the list of "natural law theorists" is extremely limited. As mentioned earlier, Strauss, in particular, sees all theorists after Plato as representing "deviations" from this tradition. Wild sees the principle of "natural law" retaining importance in the writing of Paine, and in documents like the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights.⁵⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas would be excluded from this definition, because of his belief in a law that was both prescriptive and proscriptive. Hobbes and Locke would be excluded on this basis, and also on the basis that both see natural law to be, to some extent, in opposition to man's self-interest and acquisitiveness.

⁵³ See, for example, George H. Sabine, A History of Political Theory, 1st Edition (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 1937), pp. 142-158.

⁵⁴ Hall, p. 216.

⁵⁵ Sabine, p. 143. Sabine suggests that this sort of belief grew out of the alienation and powerlessness individuals felt after the disappearance of the polis. He sees the roots of "natural law" in the writings of the Stoics and Stoic Revisionists, and in Cicero.

⁵⁶ I tend to think of this Declaration as representing an appeal

Rather generally believed.

Hall is not quite so clear about what writers would be put in the same category with Plato. His definition of "individualism" involves an understanding that there is fellowship and community between individuals, and that these individuals are not estranged from each other. Thus would seem to exclude Hobbes and Locke. As he is not so much concerned with the nature of "law" per se, however, it is possible that Hall's definition would include Aquinas, along with Aristotle, More, Rousseau, Paine, Jefferson and Hannah Arendt. His definition would definitely exclude St. Augustine, Machiavelli, Calvin, Hamilton and Nietzsche. It is difficult to tell where he might put a writer like John C. Calhoun.

The implications of looking at "natural law" in this way are quite important. Beyond the analytical difficulties of "who ought to be called what," this view affects the way we interpret important philosophical and political terms. "Morality," for example, stems from "knowledge" -- i.e. if we really "know" what is right, we will do it. "Immorality," therefore, is equated with "ignorance." Thus, there is no way in which an individual can be said to be "responsible" for action, if "responsibility" is understood to require that one "know was is right," and yet conceivably act otherwise. "Justice" cannot merely be based on a societal agreement, or a recognition of procedures, it must be based on "knowledge"; this implies that the enforcement and maintenance of "justice" ought to be what one might call "paternalistic" -- that those who "know" ought to make sure that the "ignorant" act justly, even if the "ignorant" think otherwise. As mentioned earlier, this view suggests that

to the rights of individuals to be respected as human beings, and believe that Wild interprets this differently from the way I do. This illustrates how one's association of "natural law" with Plato shapes one's perception of contemporary ideas.

"liberty" and "freedom" involve the ability to aspire towards what is "good," and not merely the ability to act in the way one believes one would like to. As such, "natural rights" do not exist to protect one's claim to "individuality," rather they represent the standard on which the merits of such claims are judged. While it is important not to impute Plato's views to those who analyze him, one can comment that those who define "natural law" in this way, are making a significant statement about the way a great deal of our world must be viewed.

Maguire and the belief in principles. Maguire's view of "natural law" is relatively simple. Natural law is defined as a belief in the existence of higher principles, as opposed to what Strauss might call "conventionalism" -- the belief that whatever "principles" exist are merely the result of the customs, understandings, and general usage of man, and do not exist outside of the empirical world.

This view is as broad as the other view is narrow. All the theorists mentioned with regard to the other views, with the exception of Nietzsche,⁵⁷ are included under this definition. The only thinkers who might be excluded are those who specifically reject such principles -- e.g. Popper, Crossman, Thorson, etc., as well as strict "empiricists."

Where the implications of the first view suggested that much of our philosophic and political language would have to be understood in a very specific way, the implications of this definition would suggest that this language can involve quite a few different, and equally appropriate meanings. "Morality," for example, can be understood to stem from "knowledge," "faith," "good character,"

⁵⁷ Machiavelli is on the borderline, depending on how one interprets the appeal being made in doctrines like "economizing on violence."

"bad conscience," "enlightened self-interest," "unenlightened self-interest," "historical or theoretical inevitability," and perhaps even "sheer luck." The only real limitation that Maguire's definition suggests is that, whatever "morality" is understood to mean, it has a basis -- objective or subjective -- outside of the empirical world.

c) How useful is it to link Plato to a "tradition of natural law?"

What I have tried to suggest is that Plato's thought differs in an important way from theorists who have often been thought to reflect a "traditional view of natural law" -- St. Thomas Aquinas, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and others. To define "natural law" in such a way so as to include Plato, therefore, involves limiting the definition such that these other thinkers are not included, or expanding the definition, such that writers with different views all are considered under the same label. To choose the first, puts a specific, and to some extent, unusual, construction on the way much of our political world and political language must be understood. To choose the second, makes our political language so broad as to be almost meaningless.

Here again, neither of these difficulties, and particularly the first, are very great if one wants to view politics the way implied by the definitions. Yet, if one believes that politics ought to be understood differently, and that our political terms should be neither as narrow as the first, nor as broad as the second, linking Plato to the "tradition of natural law" is not very useful. As in the use of Plato as a "symbol," the nature of this approach also makes it difficult for writer's to recognize the constructions they do put on political language, and this, in turn, makes the taxonomy or connection being made even more difficult to use.

The two views of tradition are useful, however, in illustrating ways in which various thought can be compared, and, in the case of the "tradition of the great debate," contrasted. We may not want to apply Plato as a standard for viewing all writers, but approaching the past this way does help to illuminate what it means to differ with Plato. Perhaps some traditions could be linked to Plato at less of a cost to our understanding of politics. In any event, to speak of Plato as part of a "tradition," requires that we recognize how this approach affects our understanding of his ideas, and also how it affects the way we view ourselves. I will now examine a different approach to self-perception -- the view of Plato as a "limits-to-growth" theorist.

Section Three: Plato as a "Limits-to-Growth" Theorist

The writers to be discussed in this section are not quite so concerned with approaching Plato as they are with approaching Plato's ideas. They do "label" Plato -- as a "limits-to-growth" theorist -- and even make a judgment about him. The form of their judgment, however, is to suggest that Plato is "good" because some of his ideas are of use to us -- i.e. that he, unlike some other theorists, is worthwhile as a source of "conventional wisdom" on a particular issue.

This view is worth examining for two reasons: first, because it is significantly different from the others I have examined, this approach helps to illustrate a different way in which examining Plato affects the way we define a contemporary argument; second, because it relates Plato to an issue which has gained importance relatively recently, it helps to illustrate how might be used in the future. The writers who have linked Plato to a "limits-to-growth" perspective

include Mulford Q. Sibley,⁵⁸ William Ophuls and E. J. Mishan.⁵⁹ I hope to show that this approach has the interesting implication of broadening the possible ways in which Plato can be viewed, while narrowing the ways in which we view a contemporary issue. To explain this point, I will examine first, the nature of their argument, second, the implications of this argument on how we view Plato and our contemporary problems, and finally, the usefulness of this approach for helping us to understand ourselves.

What are these analysts saying? Sibley, Ophuls and Mishan are no pretense towards examining Plato with an "open" mind. Quite the contrary, they look to the past specifically to see if they can find some additional insight into a problem which they consider to be extremely important. The issue is, "how are we to make sense of the need for psychological and economic limits in our society?."

What Sibley finds in Plato, primarily, is a recognition that man has a place in his environment, and that the way to the good life is not through ever-increasing desires and complexity, but through the "spirit" of accepting limitations. Ophuls goes further to argue (and Mishan to imply) that Plato provides us with a demonstration of what happens when a mass society is "on the edge." Ophuls argues that Plato shows us that when a society gets so complex that laymen cannot handle problems, the rule of the state must be turned over to "technical experts" -- in Plato's case, guardians. Ophuls concludes by suggesting that Popper shows us the agonizing choice between disorder, and the end of freedom, which is implicit in Plato's argument.

⁵⁸ Sibley actually combines quite a few different ways of approaching Plato (see p. 31), and does link Plato to a "tradition" of thinking. His analysis is a particularly good example of this approach, however.

⁵⁹ Mishan only makes mention of Plato once, to state that he has refrained from citing "useful" examples from Plato and Popper. His

In both these arguments, Plato is examined for the particular insight he can give on one issue, and not for the way the sum of his thought can be characterized or categorized. Both views express the idea that an intelligible statement can be extracted out of the analytical and historical context of Plato's writing. As Ophuls puts it, these writers do not seek guidance in "Plato's revelation" about the existence of a priori principles, but rather in Plato's understanding of "how the process of getting daily bread can affect the political process."⁶⁰ Moreover, they believe that, despite the differences between Plato's argument and the modern argument for limits, that the two refer to fundamentally the same sort of issue.

What does this argument imply? Most of the implications of this sort of argument on our understanding of Plato were explored in Chapter Three (see especially, pp. 30-32). A couple of additional comments can be added, however. This view allows for the possibility that we may extract many arguments from many different, and even conflicting thinkers. Ophuls, for example, uses both Plato and Popper. It suggests that writers may be useful for insights into some matters, and not very useful for others. While it involves a "subjective" judgement about what views are to be "useful" -- none of these analysts find much use in a thinker who demonstrates the most efficient way of achieving progress and economic prosperity -- it allows for the possibility that many different analysts can look to Plato for insight into many different matters. As a result, as long as Plato's conventional wisdom serves him, many facets of his theory can be adapted to different purposes.

argument, and use of these writers, would seem to be similar to Ophuls. For a writer who illustrates, implicitly, how one might apply Plato's view of limits to this perspective, see E. F. Schumacher, Small is Beautiful (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

Of more significance, however, are the implications of this approach on the way in which we understand the "limits-to-growth" perspective. First, it suggests that "limits-to-growth" has always been a "reasonable" position. Plato wrote long before the effects of the last century of modernization provided the type of empirical evidence which writers like Mishan and Ophuls use to support their argument that limits are needed. This suggests that, while the need for limits may have become more urgent in recent years, mankind has always been remiss in failing to recognize this need. A conflicting perception of "limits" would suggest that, up until comparatively recently, we have been far away from our limits, but, as we continue to grow exponentially, we are rapidly approaching that point.⁶¹

Second, it suggests that the appeal of the "limits-to-growth" argument is, in some sense, independent of the principles on which such an argument is justified. Sibley, for example, points not to some metaphysical principles, or even assumptions about the nature of politics, but rather to a "spirit" of limitation found in writers like Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, More, Jonathan Swift, Rousseau and Samuel Butler. As mentioned earlier, Ophuls makes it clear that he rejects the principles which underlie Plato's argument. This suggests that our appreciation for Plato's argument for limits does not stem from an appreciation of the theoretical ideas which led him to argue in this way, but rather from the reasonableness and attractiveness of the appeal itself.

Finally, the "spirit" of limitation also exists independent of the specific policy which is suggested, or even the specific justifi-

⁶⁰William Ophuls, Ecology and the Politics of Scarcity (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman & Co., 1977), p. 10.

⁶¹This sort of argument is suggested by Rufus E. Miles, in Awaken-From the American Dream (New York: Universe Books, 1976).

cation for the policy proposed. Plato argued that his Cretan city should be limited to 5,040 citizens, in part, because it was necessary for all the citizens to know each other.⁶² Sibley interprets this as a demonstration of Plato's understanding of the need for planning, and suggests that this spirit would be reflected in the modern world if cities limited their population to 250,000.⁶³ Thus, Sibley suggests that what we learn from Plato is the sense of what he suggests, and not really suggestions which are useful themselves.⁶⁴

How useful is this approach? I have tried to make clear that this approach is far more useful than the other two in permitting a broad range of possible uses of Plato's ideas. It is well-g geared towards attempting to extrance any idea from Plato which seems to be useful, and is not centered on making some definitive judgement about Plato himself.

I have also tried to suggest that viewing Plato as a source of "conventional wisdom," like viewing him as part of a "tradition," has implications for the way we understand our modern times. Specifically, this approach limits the type of appeal that the "limits-to-growth" perspective can make. It suggests that the real justification for limits lies not in the statistics of recent growth and its impact, nor in the principles that lead one to argue for limits, nor in a literal understanding of the policies which have been proposed to implement it, but rather in the "spirit" which accompanies it. If Plato's argument is truly suggestive, it is so because of

⁶² Laws, 738E.

⁶³ Mulford Q. Sibley, "The Relevance of Classical Political Theory for Economy, Technology and Ecology," Delivered at the 1972 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association (Washington: American Political Science Association, 1972), pp. 17,31.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 29.

the alluring nature of his perspective. Yet, if one does not find this perspective inately alluring already, one is unlikely to find this argument convincing. Thus, when limits-to-growth is defined in such a way that it is a topic which concerns both Plato, and ourselves, the appeal which might convince one to support the argument is limited. The essence which defines "limits-to-growth" becomes much narrower as one tries to apply Plato's ideas to the issue.

Summary. I have just examined three different ways in which Plato has been viewed. In the first section of the chapter, I discussed what it means to look upon Plato as a "symbol" of a "totalitarian" or a "democrat." I suggested that this argument may be useful for rallying support for an ideological issue at a critical time, but tends to be less than useful when the emergency passes. In the second section, I examined the view of Plato as part of a "tradition of natural law." I argued that this approach is useful for helping to illuminate what it has meant to disagree with Plato, but runs the risk of imbuing our political language and our understanding of our world with Plato's meanings. Finally, I examined the view of Plato as a source of "conventional wisdom" for the argument of "limits-to-growth." I argued that this approach allows for a broad use of Plato, but tends to narrow the usefulness and appeal of the limits-to-growth argument, by implying that the argument for limits in Plato is essentially the same as the modern position.

In short, it means something to evaluate Plato in a particular way. Our view of Plato shows something about our ideological position, and our understanding of political language, and we must be aware of that as we approach Plato. Each view of Plato bears a cost. In the next chapter, I will discuss what costs are worth bearing, and how they should be borne.

CHAPTER FIVE: Towards a Useful Approach to
Plato and Ourselves

The greatest single difficulty with a large percentage of the analysis on Plato is that it sets out to analyze Plato. In truth, analyzing Plato can never be separated from analyzing ourselves. Implicit in the way we view the past is our own aspirations and principles -- what we hope to achieve, and what we feel are important. To discuss Plato is to attempt to attain a bit of self-knowledge; we owe it to ourselves to determine what we want to learn from Plato, and why it is important, before we become embroiled in making judgements about a thinker who died almost 2500 years ago.

From my introduction onward, I have repeatedly referred to a tradeoff in analysis -- to costs we have to bear if we are to make any use of Plato's ideas at all. It may come as an anti-climax to report that I do not have a solution which eliminates this tradeoff. Rather, I will suggest what I believe to be the most effective way of living with this tradeoff, and of making as much use of Plato's ideas as possible. I will begin by elaborating on what I believe an analysis of the past can achieve; then, I will discuss what the implications of this position are for how we are to view political thought; finally, I will provide a conclusion about the most effective way of approaching Plato.

1) What can studying the theory of the past achieve? In my introduction, I expressed my belief that theory ought to help us make sense of our world. There I made what is really an artificial distinction between three advantages to studying the past: first, it helps us to see what it means to have different perspectives on politics; second, it can help us to understand ourselves; finally,

it can help us to act in the world. While these three can be thought of separately, they are actually interrelated, and rely, in part, on each other. I will examine each in turn, and then discuss this relation.

Studying theory helps us to see what it means to have different perspectives on politics. As I. M. Crombie explains, the process of studying theory ought to stimulate our thinking.⁶⁵ To study theory is to recognize that there are different assumptions one might make about politics; it is to learn to think creatively about politics by challenging our assumptions with others.

Studying theory, and studying Plato in particular, can also teach us what it means to have "vision"⁶⁶-- to think of politics as if there really were some higher, and perfectly coherent order behind it. Just as one views the motions of the planets differently after seeing the vision of Newton or Einstein, and appreciates Beethoven and Mozart differently after learning the principles of sonata-allegro form, one's view of politics is never quite the same after seeing what it is to have a "political vision." Even if we are to reject this view as dangerous, it means something to appreciate what it is to hold it. Studying theory, then, helps us to broaden our perspective on politics.

Studying theory helps us to understand ourselves. Michael B. Foster has suggested that "to understand the modern mentality is to understand ourselves ... why we are civilized [and] what we are fighting for."⁶⁷ To really understand the importance of the ideas

⁶⁵ I. M. Crombie, Plato: The Midwife's Apprentice (New York: Barnes Noble, Inc., 1964), p. 192.

⁶⁶ See Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1960), especially, p. 33.

⁶⁷ Michael B. Foster, Masters of Political Thought (Cambridge, Mass.:

we hold, we must understand how we came to hold them. Studying the theory of the past provides an insight into the history of our thought -- how our ideas came to be influential, and what ideas lost influence along the way. Moreover, studying the past gives us an insight into the analytical basis for our thought. It allows us to understand what we believe by seeing what it is we are rejecting, and why we reject it.

Studying theory helps us to act. Studying the past helps us to learn from suggestion. Plato suggested principles and policies which we may accept or reject. Additionally, reading the theory of the past helps to provide an insight into what it means to hold certain ideas. More importantly, studying the past helps us to act because it helps us to understand ourselves. We can never make a rational choice between two conflicting principles unless we know why we hold them, and what the costs are if one or the other loses out.

How these three arguments are related. First, these three reasons are interrelated in the sense that they depend on each other. Knowing how to act requires that we understand ourselves, which in turn requires that we have learned to think about politics imaginatively, and learned to challenge our assumptions. Yet, the process of learning to think about politics and reviewing the past cannot take place before we have some knowledge of ourselves and how we wish to act. As I mentioned earlier, the advice one finds in Plato, is to some extent, conditioned by what we already think to be valuable.

Second, these are related because they all rest on four important assumptions about the nature of politics: first, that our ideas and principles underlie our political action; second, that ideas

are, to some extent, the product of the way people have thought in the past; third, that we can look to past to find ideas which we recognize; and, finally, that we cannot entirely sever the process of looking for intellectual roots from that of deciding how to act. To understand what these assumptions mean, it is important to see what they are rejecting.

2) What does it mean to look at theory this way? My first assumption rejects the belief that all political action can be reduced to irrational impulses. I imply not only that ideas are relevant to action, but that we can see how ideas condition action, and, conversely, that action cannot be understood without reference to the ideas which underlie it. A conflicting view might hold that ideas do not affect action, or that ideas cannot be perceived, and must be understood as given when we examine action. Thus, I believe that an attempt to assess action empirically is neither the only nor even the best way to understand politics.

My second assumption rejects any belief that ideas are born anew each generation. It implies that Plato is a part of our modern mentality, and that there is some continuity to political thought. A conflicting argument might suggest that there is only continuity in the political experience itself (see pp. 30-32), or that there is no continuity in politics whatever. This not to say that there is some historical necessity or "great debate" involved in a "development" of thought, but merely that ideas across time are built, at least in part, on the ideas which preceded them.

My third assumption rejects the view that Plato is totally inapplicable to modern times. It implies that, whatever the differences

between Plato's thought and our own, that we can find something in Plato that we can profit from. Moreover, it suggests that we can learn not only from what Plato said, or what Plato meant, but also what Plato can be misconstrued to say or mean, or what we would like to infer from Plato. One conflicting viewpoint would be Win-spear's argument that the ideas of the past cannot possibly influence us today. Another conflicting viewpoint would be any argument which suggests that one particular approach to Plato is the only correct way to examine his ideas. Among the analysts who have made this argument are Popper, Fite, Chapman, Russell and Strauss.

A brief digression will help to illustrate the importance of this point. Many things help us to make sense of the world -- even over-simplifications and half-truths. These compromises on fact, which I will refer to as "myths," cannot be rejected off-hand as false, for they generally have something of truth in them, and are essential for providing a sense of purpose and security to individuals. It is the "myth" that there really is free competition, for example, which helps to perpetuate competitive activity, and allows individuals to make sense of their part in the economy. I am suggesting that "less than accurate" understandings about theorists can be used, like "less than accurate" understandings about other aspects of our world, to help us to act. I am also suggesting that politics is a fairly complex process, and that a wide range of differing perceptions of politics are useful. It is here where my view of politics conflicts with that of Sparshott's and to some extent Wolin's. (see pp. 38-41).

My final assumption rejects the idea that interpretation and evaluation can ever be totally separate activities. A conflicting viewpoint is implied by any writer who pretends towards making a completely objective account of Plato's ideas. As I mentioned in my introduction, what we find interesting in Plato -- what attracts our attention, is inevitably affected by the sorts of things we are interested in.⁶⁸ It is this understanding, plus the understanding that Plato's thoughts and ours are not exactly the same (see pp. 18-19), that suggests that there is the tradeoff between fidelity to Plato's intentions, and fidelity to our concerns, which I have described.

3) What is the most effective way of approaching Plato? Now that I have discussed what I believe examining Plato can achieve, I can suggest what way of approaching Plato will achieve the most. As should be clear, the idea of a "most effective way" is actually a misunderstanding. As I have brought up in the course of my examination, quite a few different approaches provide us with different sorts of useful information. What makes an approach particularly useful is not so much what information it seeks, but the recognition by the analyst of the inherent limitations of the approach, and the need for tolerance of other approaches. These two ideas, which I call "self-consciousness" and "tolerance;" will be examined, in turn.

Self-Consciousness. This involves being aware of the assumptions one makes, and what those assumptions mean.-- not only the way they expand our view of politics, but also the way they limit it. Self-consciousness is important for three reasons. First, it provides

⁶⁸It is interesting to note that writers like Dickinson and Levinson had generally assumed that Plato would be in favor of mechanization and economic expansion, and that it was not really until the need for limits became a topic of discussion that analysts began to see some of this argument in Plato's dialogues.

the means by which arguments can be compared. When the assumptions and limitations are clear, readers can weigh the analyst's perceptions of politics against their own, and determine whether an argument is convincing or not. If they fail to be convinced, they can still profit from learning what they are rejecting, and why. It is when one has to infer assumptions from the argument, as one must for Chapman and Fite, that one can never know why an approach ought to be accepted or rejected.

Second, when assumptions are put forth, the reader can judge whether an analyst has been true to these assumptions. If one is to learn what it means to make a particular assumption about politics, this sort of test is essential. Yet, in an approach like that of Chapman and Fite, as opposed to Winspear's, for example, one is presented only with the conclusions, and not the grounds on which the conclusions have been drawn.

Third, being conscious of assumptions and limitations allows the reader to fit the approach into a broader framework. When the specific area of politics that is being illuminated is spelled out, readers can know what an approach can gain, and what sorts of ideas can only be learned through different approaches. When writers are not conscious of the limitations of their argument, they imply that they are describing everything that needs to be described. As a result, an approach like Popper's must be accepted by itself, even if it does not illuminate all we wish to know.

In short, self-consciousness is essential if views are to be weighed against others, if conclusions are to be assessed for consistency, and if analyses are to be fit into a broader framework of understanding. Self-consciousness is not, however, all that is required.

Tolerance. We must be tolerant both of Plato himself, and of the possibility that other approaches to Plato can be useful. Too often analysis of Plato is seen as a wrestling match which ends when Plato is pinned to the mat. Similarly, to gain from Plato, is not to seek to defend his reputation against all possible challenge. John Wild is correct in suggesting that raising a generation to hate Plato is something of a pyrrhic victory over the past,⁶⁹ but unless we are willing to admit that Plato said things which can be both disagreed with, and interpreted in quite a few useful ways, we are cheating ourselves.

Summary. This has brought me, fortunately enough, full circle, back to the argument I began both this chapter and this paper with. To analyze Plato we must be aware that we analyze ourselves, and must act accordingly. I have suggested what we can gain from the past, and have discussed what this view means. I believe that to learn from Plato we must be willing to accept the cost of analysis, and be very conscious of these costs, so that others can decide whether they are worth bearing. We must also be tolerant, both of the possibility that Plato's ideas differ from our own, and the possibility that others may view Plato differently. The test of an approach is not whether Plato is better described, he has been dead too long to object to any interpretation; the test must be whether Plato has helped us to understand ourselves.

⁶⁹John Wild, p. 5.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION - THE PARABLE OF THE ELECTION

Last November, there was a referendum in Philadelphia to decide whether the city charter should be changed to allow the mayor -- Frank Rizzo -- to run for a third term. Despite the obvious partisan issues at stake, advertisements on the eve of the election generally did not mention the mayor by name. Rather, they took the following form:

Those arguing for the charter change began by pointing out that "over 200 years ago, Americans gathered in Philadelphia to fight for freedom." They went on to add, "isn't it surprising, that Philadelphians are still fighting for freedom? That's what charter change is all about, you know, whether you have the freedom to vote for whom you want to. You know the answer is, 'yes,' and you know that's how you'll vote on charter change. Let's bring that charter up to date. It's about time!"

Those arguing against the change began by pointing out that "not even the President of the United States can run for a third term," and added that "nothing is truer said than power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Philadelphians know that no one man is so important that he should be granted the power to rule indefinitely ." The advertisement concluded with an appeal for individuals to defend their liberty, and oppose charter change.

The question that struck me at the time, is how does one go about choosing between these two appeals. Both strike chords deep in the spirit of their audience; both seem true enough on their face. It is only when we know why such appeals do "strike chords" and what these "chords" are, that we can make a decision between these two. Hopefully, an examination of Plato, other thinkers of the past, and even analysts of our own time, can help us to make this decision.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY

In an effort to save space in the text, brief descriptions of the major works discussed in Chapters Two, Three and Four are provided here. The reader is warned to be wary of my tendency to lapse into subjective comments on the merits of the arguments and style of argumentation used in some of the books cited. These descriptions are meant to familiarize the reader with my viewpoint, as much as with the arguments of the analysts who have been discussed in this paper. My review will be divided into the three areas of discussion examined in Chapters Two through Four.

(CHAPTER TWO: Is Plato Worth Studying?)

Virtually all of the works used in this paper make at least some comment about Plato's depth of insight, talent in dramatic style or consistency in presentation. Works that spend a good deal of space on the subject of "Plato as a thinker," however, are few in number.

On one end of the spectrum is, Lucian, Plato and Greek Morals by John Jay Chapman (Cambridge, Mass.: The Riverside Press, 1931). Chapman argues that Plato "takes our mind off our troubles," but is much overrated as a thinker. Chapman argues that Lucian deserves Plato's reputation for depth of insight, while Plato deserves Lucian's reputation as an intellectual lightweight. Specifically, he faults Plato for being a "romantic visionary," who did not realize that the only truth is a moral truth which is understood through "common sense," and not through reflection. Chapman is also offended by what he believes to be Plato's "obscene and dangerous" approval of pederasty in works like the Symposium.

In a similar vein is the more sophisticated attack made by Warner Fite in The Platonic Legend (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934). In this work, Fite sets out to dispell the "divine" image he believes writers like Jowett and Shorey have given Plato. He argues that Plato was, in most ways, simply unexceptional: that Plato's purpose was merely to further aristocratic (or, perhaps more accurately, elitist) ends over those of the general population, that Plato substituted a view of "technological efficiency" for the "common sense" of the layman, that Plato's literary talents fell well below those of George Eliot or Thackeray, and that Plato's morals were childish and effeminate.

Most of the writers who attack Plato's ideas and their influence, however, have a respect, and, in some cases, even a fear of the powerfulness of Plato's thinking. This argument is expressed most clearly by H. I. Finley in Chapter VI of his Aspects of Antiquity (New York: The Viking Press, 1968). Finley argues that we have "no right to reduce [Plato] to just another good chap with queer ideas." He directs his attack not to Plato's "enemies" but Plato's "defenders" (probably Ronald Levinson), and argues that Plato's argument is powerful, intelligent, seductive, and, for these reasons, extremely dangerous.

A different sort of argument is made by Alvin W. Gouldner in Enter Plato (New York: Basic Book Publishers, 1965). Gouldner, like Finley thinks that Plato was wrong to some extent -- especially in apologizing for slavery. Gouldner, however, believes that Plato's obvious intelligence should lead us to ask the question, "how did a thinker who was so insightful come to feel this way?" (For more on Gouldner's argument see pp. 89-90).

The following is a list of other analysts mentioned in this chapter, and where more complete discussions of their arguments can be found:

Karl Popper -- pp. 84, 94.	R. H. S. Crossman -- pp. 94-9
Sheldon Wolin -- p. 91.	Alban D. Winspear -- p. 83.
Leo Strauss -- pp. 97-98.	

(CHAPTER THREE: Can We Compare Plato's Thought to Our Own?)

Much as analysts have often failed to be self-conscious, they have generally been conscious of the position of the individual they are writing about. Most of the works used include at least some introductory comment on why studying Plato is important. Those that spend some space on the issue of comparability, will be discussed in two sections:

(Section One: Plato and Time)

The strongest argument for the limitations inherent in trying to span the gap of time comes in the perspective of Alban Dewes Winspear. In The Genesis of Plato's Thought (New York: Dryden Press, 1940), Winspear takes Fite's analysis one step further to argue essentially that there is no timeless message to be gained from reading the ancient Greeks. Winspear seems to have both a Hegelian view of historical development, and a Marxist idea that historical conditions have been such that it has been impossible for anyone to rise above their own narrow, partisan interests. He attempts to "see Plato in the 'light of history'" rather than of 'pure reason.'" What he finds is a petty aristocrat who followed in the right-wing footsteps of the Pythagoreans -- and one of its most conservative

members, Socrates himself -- in reasserting the lost privileges of his own class to dominate Athens. The uniqueness of Plato, in Winspear's eyes, lies not in any ability to transcend his historical circumstances, but merely in an ability to take a broader view of his place in history than most modern pluralists do. Other analysts who do not have Winspear's view of history, but who express reservations about trying to stem the gap of time include: Ernest Barker, Prosser Frye, John Hallowell, G. C. Field and Charles McIlwain.

Karl Popper agrees with Winspear's description, but not with Winspear's argument. In The Open Society and Its Enemies (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945, 1950), Popper claims that Plato "butchered" the arguments of his contemporary democrats like Callicles. Popper, however, uses this argument as evidence of what Plato's ideas lead to, and not as an explanation of where his ideas came from. Popper believes that Plato is representative of a "way of thinking" that has existed in all societies since tribal times; this view of "repression" he associates with Plato, he calls the thinking of the "closed society." Popper argues that this sort of thinking has been in a continual battle with the forces of the "open society" represented by "liberal-democracy." (For a further discussion of Popper and similar arguments, see pp. 92-95).

John T. Bookman makes no reference to Plato's historical circumstances at all. In his article, "Plato on Political Obligation" (Western Political Quarterly, 25 (July, 1972), pp. 260-267), he suggests that Plato's premises may be more useful for developing a theory of obligation than the current attempts to define freedom of speech are. Bookman suggests that Plato is useful for isolating

and distinguishing between philosophers -- who are not bound by law, but have an ethical responsibility to the state -- and the other citizens -- who are obligated to follow the laws as long, and only as long, as the state fosters cooperation among souls.

A similar approach, on a somewhat different question, is presented by Charles Howard McIlwain in the first two chapters of The Growth of Political Thought in the West (New York: The MacMillan Co, 1932).

McIlwain begins by suggesting that the central question of all political thought has been "what can make it legitimate to have man born free and everywhere lie in chains?." McIlwain finds Plato's answer relatively similar to Calvin's -- it is legitimate if the best -- the "elect" -- rule. He suggests that this led Plato to focus on the few who were capable of rule, and on the possibility of ordering the state to achieve perfection. Thus, McIlwain analyzes Plato not through the framework of his metaphysics, nor through his historical context, but through his answer to the question of legitimacy.

Four writers who also divorce Plato from the Athens of his day, are Prosser Hall Frye, Roger Chance, G. Lowes Dickinson and Mulford Q. Sibley. Frye, in his essay, "Plato" (The University Studies of the University of Nebraska (Lincoln: The University Publishers, 1938) v. 38, No. 1-2, pp. 1-113), suggests that Plato is clear mirror of our times. He suggests that the Greek political experience was basically similar to our own -- they had great talkers, were thoroughly democratic, venal, dishonest, extravagant, conceited, and had politics as their nemesis. Frye suggests that Plato defined justice according to obligations not privileges and detested excessive freedom and the failure to recognize vulgarity. Frye basically

agrees with Plato's program, but suggests that Plato was too "carried away" with his project. The ideas Frye disagrees with are Plato's effort to eliminate all liberty and "infuse the government with morality," as well as the "monstrosity" of Plato's plan for using women to govern the state.

Roger Chance's view of Plato is quite different. His book, Until Philosophers are Kings (London: University of London Press, Ltd., 1928) attempts to rediscover the roots of the political ideas for which he and others had fought in the First World War. His thinking seems to have been influenced by some of the ideas of the social gospel movement and certain views of technocracy. The ideas he finds echoed in Plato's thought include the quest for the City of God, the distinction between the abstract concepts of Good and Evil, and a rejection of social contract theory. Chance disagrees with what he calls the "static attitude toward life" found in Plato's ethics, and with the "discredited notion of state sovereignty" found in Plato's political ideas. He argues that a balance must be struck between Plato's authoritarianism and the "excessive freedom" of Victorian England.

G. Lowes Dickinson wrote two works that were used in this study. The first, After 2000 Years (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1932) creates a dialogue between Plato and a modern Englishman, with the curious name of Philaethes. While some of the conversation is spent on discussing what Plato meant, Philaethes does most of the talking. The Englishman manages to convince Plato of the virtues of some of the institutions of modern society including the League of Nations and modern technology. Philaethes also gets the better

of arguments on censorship and eugenics. In the other work, Plato and His Dialogues (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1932), Dickinson presents a somewhat more idealized analysis of Plato. He suggests that there is "no topic of importance which we discuss that Plato did not discuss too," and likens Plato's experience of writing after the Peloponnesian War to the experience of writing after the First World War. Dickinson examines the Republic and Laws, and comes to the conclusion that Plato died "in the faith" that his Cretan city might actually be established. Dickinson also suggests that politics was not Plato's primary concern -- that his main preoccupations were as a philosopher and a "lover."

Mulford Q. Sibley's connection with these writers is somewhat tenuous. In "The Relevance of Classical Political Theory for Economy, Technology, and Ecology," (Delivered at the 1972 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association (Washington: The American Political Science Association, 1972)), he does make an argument for the ways in which the problems Plato faced were similar to our own, and it is on that basis that he has been included here. The problems we share with Plato, according to Sibley, include the population problem, the natural resources question, and issues concerning money, commerce, ecology, nature and stability. Sibley sees much of these problems arising after the imperialism and acquisitiveness of Athens brought it into the disastrous war with Sparta. For more discussion on Sibley's argument, see pp. 100-101.

Three writers who examine Plato's environment with the specific intention of interpreting Plato in light of his historical circumstances are Eric Havelock, G. C. Field and Werner Jaeger. Havelock

wrote two works which are somewhat different in character, if not in approach. The first, The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), takes up part of Winspear's argument, but not from a perspective of historical development. In this book, Havelock attempts to rediscover the democratic elements in Plato's Athens, and finds it in the sophists Plato criticized. He concludes, on somewhat speculative evidence, that Plato misrepresented democratic thinkers like Gorgias, Protagoras and Thrasymachus, and that Plato was a propagandist for the conservative cause. Unlike Winspear, however, Havelock does not disparage on Plato's usefulness or even really his motives. He argues that Plato should not be expected to reproduce accurately the arguments of those with whom he disagreed.

My references to Havelock in the paper, however, have generally had his later work -- Preface to Plato (New York: The Universal Library, 1967) -- in mind. In this work, Havelock examines Plato's environment to see what might have led him to suggest censoring the poets. In an argument which is better evidenced than that made in the earlier work, Havelock presents an extensive justification of this policy. His argument rests primarily on a discussion of the socializing affects the constant repetition of Homer's poetry must have had in the "oral culture" of ancient Greece.

In Plato and His Contemporaries (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1930), F. C. Field presents an approach which puts Plato in an even better light. Field accepts as given that there is a universal element to Plato's writing, and places a heavy presumption against arguments which seek to impute bad motives to Plato based on what Field believes

to be tenuous assumptions. Field believes that Plato's view of the unity of the state transcended partisan considerations and so had nothing in common with the oligarchic parties in Athens. He plays down possible inconsistencies between Plato and other Socratics (particularly Xenophon) as primarily differences in emphasis. Moreover, Field imputes a harmless motive to Plato in using real names for characters in his dialogues; he calls this a common Greek practice, and believes that there is insufficient evidence to prove that Plato intended to mask his contemporaries.

Werner Jaeger goes even further to understand Plato's weaknesses (where they exist) in the "sympathetic" light of a study of his environment, in his work Paideia (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945, 1963). Jaeger's roots lie in the Hegelian idealism prominent in the German Universities of the late 19th Century. In Paideia, he examines Greek culture and links Plato with the greatest ideals of Greek thinking, and with the "lifelong struggle of man to free himself from ignorance." Jaeger holds Plato more or less guiltless for attacking the poets, by arguing that such assaults were in the tradition of writers like Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Aeschylus and Pindar. Unlike Havelock, Jaeger calls Plato's depreciation of the Athenian principles of written law and equal rights an "exaggeration which can be understood only if we recall the spiritual dangers of his day."

Alvin W. Gouldner is not very concerned with romanticizing either ancient Greece or Plato himself. In Enter Plato (supra.), he openly sets out to judge the Greeks in general, and Plato and Aristotle in particular, by their fidelity to the standards which we modern

observers believe to be correct. He justifies this by arguing that the historian of social theory should acknowledge that he is, inevitably, a critic on what he/she reports. Accordingly, while he admires Plato for providing the first comprehensive diagnosis of the human condition, he admonishes Plato for accepting the principle that government ought to be restricted to a small group and for accepting the institution of slavery. Gouldner believes that it is Plato's apology for slavery, and not any partisanship in his writings, which represents the "tragic flaw" in Plato's analysis.

Ernest Barker also presents a judgement on Plato's arguments. In his work, The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle (London: Methuen & Co., 1906), Barker criticizes Plato for using false analogies, for wresting the right of making government from the people, for failing to realize that the roots of the present lie in the past, for failing to recognize the need for individual personality, and for instituting a "tyranny of principles." The perspective Barker applies to this argument is similar to Gouldner's in that he attempts to analyze Plato's intellectual environment, in an effort to explain what Plato meant, before criticizing these ideas.

(Section Two: Plato and Politics)

The most important of the writers who call Plato "apolitical" are F. E. Sparshott, and Sheldon Wolin. Sparshott, in his essay, "Plato as an anti-Political Thinker," (in Gregory Vlastos, ed., Plato, A Collection of Critical Essays (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1971), v. 2, pp. 214-219), suggests the Plato was psychologically incapable of acquiescing to compromise. Sparshott

believes that politics involves conflict, flux, and divergent opinions and that Plato tried to eliminate these through "social engineering." He concludes by suggesting that politics is a field where decisions cannot be based on knowledge, and that Plato's philosopher has nothing to contribute to such a field.

A similar, and better reasoned argument is made by Sheldon Wolin in Politics and Vision (Boston: Little, Brown & Co, 1960). Wolin admires Plato for isolating the "political" as a field for study, and argues that the origin of many of the terms we use in politics dates from Plato's work. Wolin also believes that studying Plato is important for understanding what it is to have a "political vision." On the other hand, however, he believes that Plato stated the classic case against "politics," by trying to eliminate "conflict" as if it were a "disease." Wolin also makes a strong case for the argument that "expert" knowledge is not the only relevant sort in the political arena; he argues that Plato's failure to see the importance of the agreement by popular consensus on "truths" in binding the state together would have doomed his Republic to dissolution. Some of this view of politics can also be seen in two essays by Wayne A. R. Leys ("Was Plato Non-Political?" and "An Afterthought" in Vlastos, Op. Cit., pp. 166-173 and pp. 184-186 respectively), as well as in Barker (supra.), Chance (supra.), Gouldner (supra.), and I. M. Crombie, Plato: The Midwife's Apprentice (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1964).

David Grene, in Man In His Pride (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950) suggests that Plato presented a fundamentally different view of politics than ours. Grene argues that Plato's life cannot be separated from his thought, and his political views cannot be

severed from their interdependent relation with the rest of his philosophy. Grene believes that Plato's conception of the relation between the eternal forms and all aspects of thought "came to him in a single moment of illumination." Accordingly, Grene finds a continuity in all of Plato's works in the constant relationship between the soul of the individual, the state and the Forms.

(CHAPTER FOUR: How Should We View Plato?)

Plato's legacy is, of course, quite diverse. As with my summaries of analysts in the last chapter, I will divide my discussion into the sections found in the paper itself.

(Section One: Plato as a "Totalitarian" (or a "Democrat"))

As Hitler began to rise to power, there was a shift in the nature of the discussion from attempts to look to Plato for justification for the ideals that were fought for in the "Great War" to attempts to determine Plato's culpability as the mentor for the new totalitarian states. This debate continued well into the 1940's and early 1950's, and some of the arguments are still the subject of discussion today (see summary of Ophuls, p.101). Exponents of the view of "Plato as a totalitarian" include Renford Bambrough, Thomas Langdon Thorson, R. F. Alfred Hoernlé, Bertrand Russell, Karl Popper and R. H. S. Crossman; opponents of these arguments include John Hallowell, H. D. Acton, and Ronald Levinson (to be discussed here) and several other analysts to be examined under the next section.

In "Plato's Modern Friends and Enemies," an introductory essay to his anthology entitled Plato, Popper and Politics (Cambridge,

England: Heffer & Sons, Ltd., 1967), Renford Bambrough tries to clarify some of the points in the dispute over Plato as a totalitarian. He argues that the types of attacks made on Plato's use of censorship and "lying" fail to put Plato's argument in the perspective of his metaphysical belief in the existence of an absolute truth. Bambrough continues, however, by arguing that Plato's assumption that there is such a discoverable truth is incorrect. As such, he claims that Plato is rightly connected with totalitarianism, not because he would agree with the Fascists (or, interestingly enough, the Catholics) over what truth is to be discovered, but because he believes that such a truth can be discovered. Thomas Landon Thorson also links totalitarianism to the reliance on absolute standards in the introduction to his anthology, Plato: Totalitarian or Democrat? (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1963). In a speech given April 1937, entitled "Would Plato have Approved of the National-Socialist State" (in Bambrough, pp. 20-36), R. F. Alfred Hoernlé suggests that Plato would have like Hitler's methods (!), if not Hitler's ideas.

Lord Bertrand Russell reaches a similar, if not quite so extreme conclusion in Chapters 11-15 of his A History of Western Philosophy (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1945). Russell argues that the guardian class in Plato's Republic is a class apart from the rest of society -- like the Jesuits in Paraguay or the Communist Party in the Soviet Union. Russell describes the four cardinal virtues of this class as gravity, courage, decorum and the quality cultivated in education. A "philosopher," Russell suggests, is one who agrees with Plato, and "justice" is "minding one's business." Russell

argues that Plato's state achieves success in war and enough to eat, and nothing more. Finally, he concludes, with a small bit of irony, that Plato's ideas are unverifiable because, if one were to spend as much time as Plato demands, on mathematics (and Greek), one would never have time to analyze Plato.

Karl Popper (supra.) raises some similar arguments in his interpretation of what Plato wrote. The difference between Popper and Russell is that Popper tries to make a general statement about Plato's theoretical ideas as well. Popper believes that Plato, Rousseau, Hegel and Marx are part of tradition of totalitarianism, linked by a common belief in what he calls "historicism" -- the idea that scientific methods can be used to understand the laws of human development and predict the future of mankind. He finds "historicism" in Plato's view of the decay of states and in his desire to "arrest all change" through social engineering. Popper argues that Plato mistakenly asked "who should rule?," rather than "how can we organize the state so that bad, or incompetent, rulers do not do too much damage?" and, as such, failed to recognize the need for democratic institutions as a check against tyrannical rule. Finally, Popper suggests that Plato, in his reliance on absolute answers and social engineering, actually betrayed Socrates -- the man who knew nothing.

The difference between Plato and Socrates is of even greater concern to R. H. S. Crossman. In Plato To-day (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1937), Crossman discusses how Plato might have felt about the modern world. He concludes that, while Plato would have opposed the Soviet exaltation of material prosperity and German

militarism, he would have supported the Stalinist rule by philosophic ideal, and would have admired Hitler's appreciation of the need to sway minds through the use of half-truths. Crossman argues that Plato and, indeed, modern totalitarians, fail to appreciate the capacity of the common man for understanding, and overestimate the potential for supremacy by the state. He argues that Plato missed the central teaching of Socrates -- that philosophy can never discover what is "right" or "just." Crossman's book has an understandable tone of fear, as he argues that democracy is losing, and fascism has the initiative, because too few are willing to defend democratic principles against Plato's argument.

John H. Hallowell presents a cogent and interesting response to Popper and Crossman in his chapter "Plato and the Moral Foundation of Democracy" (reprinted in Thorson, pp. 129-149). He points out that Plato saw the transition to tyranny as a degeneration of the political system, and argues that Plato made a strong theoretical argument for freedom. Hallowell argues that Plato recognized the need for authority, and that, it is when a state lacks authority that it must rule through brute force. He argues that Plato recognized that freedom is the pursuit of perfection, not insatiable passions. Hallowell provides more arguments about the nature of Plato's policies in his essay "Plato and His Critics," (Journal of Politics (27) No. 2, May 1965, pp. 273-289, and in his book, Main Currents in Modern Political Thought (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1950). (cf. Michael B. Foster, Masters of Political Thought (Cambridge, Mass.: The Riverside Press, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1941), Chapters 1-2.

A similar sort of argument is made by H. B. Acton in his essay, "The Alleged Fascism of Plato" (reprinted in Bambrough, pp. 38-48). Acton equates Naziism with anti-rationalism, anti-intellectualism and a belief that what is best is what "serves." He suggests that Plato's ideas were diametrically opposed to these. Finally, he concludes that Plato expressed fear about the multitude imposing their views on the minority, and, as such, recognized the need for security in attitudes.

Ronald Levinson is not very concerned with the debate over the principles which lead to "totalitarianism." Rather he is concerned with refuting the interpretation of writers like Popper, Crossman, Hinspear and Fite. In his book, In Defense of Plato (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), he suggests that writers like these distort Plato's argument, or, at least fail to give Plato the benefit of the doubt. He disputes Popper's use of the term "historicism" instead of "methodological essentialism"; he argues that Plato, far from being an aristocrat, held contempt for the well-born and wealthy. Levinson believes that Plato recognized the need for individual fulfillment and, while Plato may have underestimated individual capacities, he would have welcomed proof that he was wrong on this point. He concludes by suggesting the Plato was, primarily, a philosopher, whose works show us the need to appeal to reason, and that Plato would have liked modern ideas of pacifism, the town meeting and automation.

(Section Two: Plato as a "Natural Law" Theorist)

Beginning in the early fifties and sixties, a group of analysts began writing a different sort of response to the arguments of Popper

and Crossman. These writers suggest that Plato should be associated not with "totalitarianism," but rather with the principles of natural law. Writers who make this argument include Leo Strauss (and his school), John Wild, Joseph P. Maguire and Robert William Hall.

Perhaps the most important argument on this subject can be found in the writing of Leo Strauss, Herbert Storing, Joseph Cropsey, Allan Bloom and others of the Straussian school. This group consists largely of refugees from Hitler's Germany and their students, who have a particular view of politics, and a particular method of interpretation. They argue that the rejection of absolute principles of political rights is an acceptance of nihilism and a license for the "morality" of the Nazis. Their interpretations are characterized by an incredibly close attention to minute details in text. The Straussians look to Plato as the mentor for the belief in the existence of true and immutable principles, outside the empirical world, which guide political action, and can be used as a standard for assessing the "rightness" of action.

Strauss finds the classic statement of this position in the "utopia" of the Republic and the concessions made to earthly imperfection in the Laws. In Natural Right and History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), he discusses this statement and points to what he calls the "crisis of modern natural right." He argues that Hobbes and Locke wrongly substituted hedonism for the principle that one must conform to standards independent of the human will; he attacks Rousseau, somewhat less vehemently, for making virtue "social" rather than "individual", and Burke, somewhat more vehemently, for concluding that convention was the highest authority.

In What is Political Philosophy? (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1959), Strauss argues for the role of political philosophy as the "umpire par excellence" in classical philosophy for claims by partisans, and the need to order even immediate political questions with a view toward what is best in the political order. Strauss provides a meticulous interpretation of Plato, based on the belief that Plato is consistent throughout all his works (a consistency he does not find, for example, in the writings of Hobbes). Strauss attacks Machiavelli, and the "historicists" -- thinkers, like Marx, and Hegel, who believe that all political action can be explained through the inevitable force of historical development -- arguing that these thinkers wrongly see political action as conditioned by circumstance.

The consistency in Plato's argument throughout his life is explored more fully in the History of Political Philosophy (Chicago: Rand McNally Co., 1972) written by Strauss, Cropsey and others. The authors point to Plato's emphasis on the reluctance of the philosopher to rule, and other, less prominent, statements in the Republic, as evidence that Plato really meant to demonstrate why such a perfect state could not possibly come about. These writers argue that Plato's thought progressed through the Statesman and culminated in the presentation of the best state man could achieve in the Laws. (cf. Allan Bloom's interpretive essay in his translation of The Republic of Plato (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1968) Bloom argues, for example, that Book Five is "preposterous," and was meant to drive home the implausibility of the existence of such a Republic).

Although Wild's interpretation of Plato differs from Strauss's there are some similarities in their respective views of Plato as a "natural law theorist." In Plato's Modern Enemies and the Theory of Natural Law (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), Wild argues that authoritarianism and dogmatism stems from relying on formulations one cannot explain, and that Plato demonstrated the need for reason to guide our action. The first half of the book contains a defense of Plato, where he concludes that what separates Plato and Popper is not really a difference in attitude about militarism or etatism, but merely the fact that Plato believes that philosophy is really possible. The second half of the book presents an argument that Plato is really the source of a "natural law" tradition, based on his belief in the correctness and beauty of natural principles of order. Wild argues that Hobbes and Locke deviated from this tradition in thinking that nature is something to be overcome, but that Locke and Paine helped to transmit this tradition to American thinking. (cf. Wild's Plato's Theory of Man (New York: Octagon Books, 1946, 1974) where he draws some of the implications of his position to the startling conclusion that Plato's degeneration of the states has actually taken place through human history).

Joseph Maguire links Plato to a much more general tradition of natural law -- that of a belief in the existence of principles which transcend the empirical world. In "Plato's Theory of Natural Law," in Alfred R. Bellinger, ed. Yale Classical Studies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), v. 10, pp. 151-178), Maguire argues that this concept of natural law applies equally to the "utilitarians"

and even thinkers who hold "subjective" views of what these principles are. The rest of his analysis is a discussion of some of the elements of the view of principles as it is seen in several of the dialogues.

Robert William Hall links Plato to the related tradition of "individualism." In Plato and the Individual (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), he argues that, despite the fact that the Greeks had no comparable word for "individual," Plato was essentially an individualist. Hall believes it is accurate to apply this term to Plato because he believed that individuals were the basis unit of social structure, instead of existing for such structures. Hall argues that Plato had a deep concern for the excellence of each individual -- a concern which continued even after individuals died and left the polis. Hall concludes by arguing that Plato's conception of the individual's separation from society, individual freedom and responsibility for action and the equality of all men, are the standard by which one can determine what individualism is.

(Section Three: Plato as a "Limits-to-Growth" Theorist)

In the wake of increasing concern about environmental issues, there has been a recent movement to see Plato as an apostle of personal, and societal limitation. This line of thinking may become more important as issues like energy use and pollution begin to occupy more significant space in political discussion.

An interesting interpretation of Plato's position on growth comes from Hulford Q. Sibley (supra.). Sibley argues that Plato and the whole "classical tradition" reflected on the nature of man, and had

a conception of man's place in his environment. He argues that Plato was quite concerned with the problem of stability and human psychology in large and changing societies. Sibley sees in Socrates' disagreement with Polemarchus and Cephalus the argument that the increase in human wants leads to increasing complexity, specialization and conflict, and points to the Laws as evidence that Plato recognized the need to limit population and provide social planning. He concludes that it is the classical spirit which points us in the direction of limits.

William Ophuls in Ecology and the Politics of Scarcity (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman & Co., 1977) uses Plato somewhat differently. Using the image of the "parable of the ship" Ophuls argues that Plato shows us what happens when "society approaches the point where it can no longer be controlled. Ophuls specifically rejects Plato's metaphysics, and argues from a perspective which he calls a "Malthusian view of biological necessity." He also rejects Plato's view of government, arguing, with Popper, that Plato shows us what we must avoid -- i.e. the rule by those who "know." Ophuls suggests that we cannot accept a rule by "benevolent guardians" much less the "rule by technocrats" which may result if things continue to become more and more complex.

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