

## CHAPTER 7 : THE PRINCIPLE OF LEADERSHIP

The wise shall lead and rule, and the ignorant shall follow.

PLATO.

Certain objections <sup>1</sup> to our interpretation of Plato's political programme have forced us into an investigation of the part played, within this programme, by such moral ideas as Justice, Goodness, Beauty, Wisdom, Truth, and Happiness. The present and the next two chapters are to continue this analysis, and the part played by the idea of Wisdom in Plato's political philosophy will occupy us next.

We have seen that Plato's idea of justice demands, fundamentally, that the natural rulers should rule and the natural slaves should slave. It is part of the historicist demand that the state, in order to arrest all change, should be a copy of its Idea, or of its true 'nature'. This theory of justice indicates very clearly that Plato saw the fundamental problem of politics in the question : *Who shall rule the state?*

### I

It is my conviction that by expressing the problem of politics in the form 'Who should rule?' or 'Whose will should be supreme?', etc., Plato created a lasting confusion in political philosophy. It is indeed analogous to the confusion he created in the field of moral philosophy by his identification, discussed in the last chapter, of collectivism and altruism. It is clear that once the question 'Who should rule?' is asked, it is hard to avoid some such reply as 'the best' or 'the wisest' or 'the born ruler' or 'he who masters the art of ruling' (or, perhaps, 'The General Will' or 'The Master Race' or 'The Industrial Workers' or 'The People'). But such a reply, convincing as it may sound—for who would advocate the rule of 'the worst' or 'the greatest fool' or 'the born slave'?—is, as I shall try to show, quite useless.

First of all, such a reply is liable to persuade us that some fundamental problem of political theory has been solved. But if we approach political theory from a different angle, then we find that far from solving any fundamental problems, we have

merely skipped over them, by assuming that the question 'Who should rule?' is fundamental. For even those who share this assumption of Plato's admit that political rulers are not always sufficiently 'good' or 'wise' (we need not worry about the precise meaning of these terms), and that it is not at all easy to get a government on whose goodness and wisdom one can implicitly rely. If that is granted, then we must ask whether political thought should not face from the beginning the possibility of bad government; whether we should not prepare for the worst leaders, and hope for the best. But this leads to a new approach to the problem of politics, for it forces us to replace the question: *Who should rule?* by the new<sup>2</sup> question: *How can we so organize political institutions that bad or incompetent rulers can be prevented from doing too much damage?*

Those who believe that the older question is fundamental, tacitly assume that political power is 'essentially' unchecked. They assume that someone has the power—either an individual or a collective body, such as a class. And they assume that he who has the power can, very nearly, do what he wills, and especially that he can strengthen his power, and thereby approximate it further to an unlimited or unchecked power. They assume that political power is, essentially, sovereign. If this assumption is made, then, indeed, the question 'Who is to be the sovereign?' is the only important question left.

I shall call this assumption the *theory of (unchecked) sovereignty*, using this expression not for any particular one of the various theories of sovereignty, proffered more especially by such writers as Bodin, Rousseau, or Hegel, but for the more general assumption that political power is practically unchecked, or for the demand that it ought to be so; together with the implication that the main question left is to get this power into the best hands. This theory of sovereignty is tacitly assumed in Plato's approach, and has played its rôle ever since. It is also implicitly assumed, for instance, by those modern writers who believe that the main problem is: Who should dictate? The capitalists or the workers?

Without entering into a detailed criticism, I wish to point out that there are serious objections against a rash and implicit acceptance of this theory. Whatever its speculative merits may appear to be, it is certainly a very unrealistic assumption. No political power has ever been unchecked, and as long as men remain human (as long as the 'Brave New World' has not

materialized), there can be no absolute and unrestrained political power. So long as one man cannot accumulate enough physical power in his hands to dominate all others, just so long must he depend upon his helpers. Even the most powerful tyrant depends upon his secret police, his henchmen and his hangmen. This dependence means that his power, great as it may be, is not unchecked, and that he has to make concessions, playing one group off against another. It means that there are other political forces, other powers besides his own, and that he can exert his rule only by utilizing and pacifying them. This shows that even the extreme cases of sovereignty are never cases of pure sovereignty. They are never cases in which the will or the interest of one man (or, if there were such a thing, the will or the interest of one group) can achieve his aim directly, without giving up some of it in order to enlist powers which he cannot conquer. And in an overwhelming number of cases, the limitations of political power go much further than this.

I have stressed these empirical points, not because I wish to use them as an argument, but merely in order to avoid objections. My claim is that every theory of sovereignty omits to face a more fundamental question—the question, namely, whether we should not strive towards institutional control of the rulers by balancing their powers against other powers. This *theory of checks and balances* can at least claim careful consideration. The only objections to this claim, as far as I can see, are (a) that such a control is *practically* impossible, or (b) that it is *essentially* inconceivable since political power is essentially sovereign<sup>3</sup>. Both of these dogmatic objections are, I believe, refuted by the facts; and with them fall a number of other influential views (for instance, the theory that the only alternative to the dictatorship of one class is that of another class).

In order to raise the question of institutional control of the rulers, we need not assume more than that governments are not always good or wise. But since I have said something about historical facts, I think I should confess that I feel inclined to go a little beyond this assumption. I am inclined to think that rulers have rarely been above the average, either morally or intellectually, and often below it. And I think that it is reasonable to adopt, in politics, the principle of preparing for the worst, as well as we can, though we should, of course, at the same time try to obtain the best. It appears to me madness to base all our political efforts upon the faint hope that we shall be successful

in obtaining excellent, or even competent, rulers. Strongly as I feel in these matters, I must insist, however, that my criticism of the theory of sovereignty does not depend on these more personal opinions.

Apart from these personal opinions, and apart from the above mentioned empirical arguments against the general theory of sovereignty, there is also a kind of logical argument which can be used to show the inconsistency of any of the particular forms of the theory of sovereignty ; more precisely, the logical argument can be given different but analogous forms to combat the theory that the wisest should rule, or else the theories that the best, or the law, or the majority, etc., should rule. One particular form of this logical argument is directed against a too naïve version of liberalism, of democracy, and of the principle that the majority should rule ; and it is somewhat similar to the well-known '*paradox of freedom*' which has been used first, and with success, by Plato. In his criticism of democracy, and in his story of the rise of the tyrant, Plato raises implicitly the following question : What if it is the will of the people that they should not rule, but a tyrant instead ? The free man, Plato suggests, may exercise his absolute freedom, first by defying the laws and ultimately by defying freedom itself and by clamouring for a tyrant<sup>4</sup>. This is not just a far-fetched possibility ; it has happened a number of times ; and every time it has happened, it has put in a hopeless intellectual position all those democrats who adopt, as the ultimate basis of their political creed, the principle of the majority rule or a similar form of the principle of sovereignty. On the one hand, the principle they have adopted demands from them that they should oppose any but the majority rule, and therefore the new tyranny ; on the other hand, the same principle demands from them that they should accept any decision reached by the majority, and thus the rule of the new tyrant. The inconsistency of their theory must, of course, paralyse their actions<sup>5</sup>. Those of us democrats who demand the institutional control of the rulers by the ruled, and especially the right of dismissing the government by a majority vote, must therefore base these demands upon better grounds than a self-contradictory theory of sovereignty. (That this is possible will be briefly shown in the next section of this chapter.)

Plato, we have seen, came near to discovering the paradoxes of freedom and of democracy. But what Plato and his followers overlooked is that all the other forms of the theory of sovereignty

give rise to analogous inconsistencies. *All theories of sovereignty are paradoxical.* For instance, we may have selected 'the wisest' or 'the best' as a ruler. But 'the wisest' in his wisdom may find that not he but 'the best' should rule, and 'the best' in his goodness may perhaps decide that 'the majority' should rule. It is important to notice that even that form of the theory of sovereignty which demands the 'Kingship of the Law' is open to the same objection. This, in fact, has been seen very early, as Heraclitus' remark<sup>6</sup> shows: 'The law can demand, too, that the will of One Man must be obeyed.'

In summing up this brief criticism, one can, I believe, assert that the theory of sovereignty is in a weak position, both empirically and logically. The least that can be demanded is that it must not be adopted without careful consideration of other possibilities.

## II

And indeed, it is not difficult to show that a theory of democratic control can be developed which is free of the paradox of sovereignty. The theory I have in mind is one which does not proceed, as it were, from a doctrine of the intrinsic goodness or righteousness of a majority rule, but rather from the baseness of tyranny; or more precisely, it rests upon the decision, or upon the adoption of the proposal, to avoid and to resist tyranny.

For we may distinguish two main types of government. The first type consists of governments of which we can get rid without bloodshed—for example, by way of general elections; that is to say, the social institutions provide means by which the rulers may be dismissed by the ruled, and the social traditions<sup>7</sup> ensure that these institutions will not easily be destroyed by those who are in power. The second type consists of governments which the ruled cannot get rid of except by way of a successful revolution—that is to say, in most cases, not at all. I suggest the term 'democracy' as a short-hand label for a government of the first type, and the term 'tyranny' or 'dictatorship' for the second. This, I believe, corresponds closely to traditional usage. But I wish to make clear that no part of my argument depends on the choice of these labels; and should anybody reverse this usage (as is frequently done nowadays), then I should simply say that I am in favour of what he calls 'tyranny', and object to what he calls 'democracy'; and I should reject as irrelevant any attempt to discover what 'democracy' 'really' or 'essentially' means, for example, by translating the term into 'the

rule of the people'. (For although 'the people' may influence the actions of their rulers by the threat of dismissal, they never rule themselves in any concrete, practical sense.)

If we make use of the two labels as suggested, then we can now describe, as the principle of a democratic policy, the proposal to create, develop, and protect political institutions for the avoidance of tyranny. This principle does not imply that we can ever develop institutions of this kind which are faultless or foolproof, or which ensure that the policies adopted by a democratic government will be right or good or wise—or even necessarily better or wiser than the policies adopted by a benevolent tyrant. (Since no such assertions are made, the paradox of democracy is avoided.) What may be said, however, to be implied in the adoption of the democratic principle is the conviction that the acceptance of even a bad policy in a democracy (as long as we can work for a peaceful change) is preferable to the submission to a tyranny, however wise or benevolent. Seen in this light, the theory of democracy is not based upon the principle that the majority should rule; rather, the various equalitarian methods of democratic control, such as general elections and representative government, are to be considered as no more than well-trying and, in the presence of a widespread traditional distrust of tyranny, reasonably effective institutional safeguards against tyranny, always open to improvement, and even providing methods for their own improvement.

He who accepts the principle of democracy in this sense is therefore not bound to look upon the result of a democratic vote as an authoritative expression of what is right. Although he will accept a decision of the majority, for the sake of making the democratic institutions work, he will feel free to combat it by democratic means, and to work for its revision. And should he live to see the day when the majority vote destroys the democratic institutions, then this sad experience will tell him only that there does not exist a foolproof method of avoiding tyranny. But it need not weaken his decision to fight tyranny, nor will it expose his theory as inconsistent.

### III

Returning to Plato, we find that by his emphasis upon the problem 'who should rule', he implicitly assumed the general theory of sovereignty. The question of an institutional control of the rulers, and of an institutional balancing of their powers,

is thereby eliminated without ever having been raised. The interest is shifted from institutions to questions of personnel, and the most urgent problem now becomes that of selecting the natural leaders, and that of training them for leadership.

In view of this fact some people think that in Plato's theory, the welfare of the state is ultimately an ethical and spiritual matter, depending on persons and personal responsibility rather than on the construction of impersonal institutions. I believe that this view of Platonism is superficial. *All long-term politics are institutional.* There is no escape from that, not even for Plato. The principle of leadership does not replace institutional problems by problems of personnel, it only creates new institutional problems. As we shall see, it even burdens the institutions with a task which goes beyond what can be reasonably demanded from a mere institution, namely, with *the task of selecting the future leaders.* It would be therefore a mistake to think that the opposition between the theory of balances and the theory of sovereignty corresponds to that between institutionalism and personalism. Plato's principle of leadership is far removed from a pure personalism since it involves the working of institutions ; and indeed it may be said that a pure personalism is impossible. But it must be said that a pure institutionalism is impossible also. Not only does the construction of institutions involve important personal decisions, but the functioning of even the best institutions (such as democratic checks and balances) will always depend, to a considerable degree, on the persons involved. Institutions are like fortresses. They must be well designed *and* manned.

This distinction between the personal and the institutional element in a social situation is a point which is often missed by the critics of democracy. Most of them are dissatisfied with democratic institutions because they find that these do not necessarily prevent a state or a policy from falling short of some moral standards or of some political demands which may be urgent as well as admirable. But these critics misdirect their attacks ; they do not understand what democratic institutions may be expected to do, and what the alternative to democratic institutions would be. Democracy (using this label in the sense suggested above) provides the institutional framework for the reform of political institutions. It makes possible the reform of institutions without using violence, and thereby the use of reason in the designing of new institutions and the adjusting of old ones. It cannot provide reason. The question of the intellectual and moral standard of

its citizens is to a large degree a personal problem. (The idea that this problem can be tackled, in turn, by an institutional eugenic and educational control is, I believe, mistaken; some reasons for my belief will be given below.) It is quite wrong to blame democracy for the political shortcomings of a democratic state. We should rather blame ourselves, that is to say, the citizens of the democratic state. In a non-democratic state, the only way to achieve reasonable reforms is by the violent overthrow of the government, and the introduction of a democratic framework. Those who criticize democracy on any 'moral' grounds fail to distinguish between personal and institutional problems. It rests with us to improve matters. The democratic institutions cannot improve themselves. The problem of improving them is always a problem for *persons* rather than for institutions. But if we want improvements, we must make clear which *institutions* we want to improve.

There is another distinction within the field of political problems corresponding to that between persons and institutions. It is the one between the problems of the day and the problems of the future. While the problems of the day are largely personal, the building of the future must necessarily be institutional. If the political problem is approached by asking 'Who should rule', and if Plato's principle of leadership is adopted—that is to say, the principle that the best should rule—then the problem of the future must take the form of designing institutions for the selection of future leaders.

This is one of the most important problems in Plato's theory of education. In approaching it I do not hesitate to say that Plato utterly corrupted and confused the theory and practice of education by linking it up with his theory of leadership. The damage done is, if possible, even greater than that inflicted upon ethics by the identification of collectivism with altruism, and upon political theory by the introduction of the principle of sovereignty. Plato's assumption that it should be the task of education (or more precisely, of the educational institutions) to select the future leaders, and to train them for leadership, is still largely taken for granted. By burdening these institutions with a task which must go beyond the scope of any institution, Plato is partly responsible for their deplorable state. But before entering into a general discussion of his view of the task of education, I wish to develop, in more detail, his theory of leadership, the leadership of the wise.



## IV

I think it most likely that this theory of Plato's owes a number of its elements to the influence of Socrates. One of the fundamental tenets of Socrates was, I believe, his moral intellectualism. By this I understand (a) his identification of goodness and wisdom, his theory that nobody acts against his better knowledge, and that lack of knowledge is responsible for all moral mistakes ; (b) his theory that moral excellence can be taught, and that it does not require any particular moral faculties, apart from the universal human intelligence.

Socrates was a moralist and an enthusiast. He was the type of man who would criticize any form of government for its shortcomings (and indeed, such criticism would be necessary and useful for any government, although it is possible only under a democracy) but he recognized the importance of being loyal to the laws of the state. As it happened, he spent his life largely under a democratic form of government, and as a good democrat he found it his duty to expose the incompetence and windbagery of some of the democratic leaders of his time. At the same time, he opposed any form of tyranny ; and if we consider his courageous behaviour under the Thirty Tyrants then we have no reason to assume that his criticism of the democratic leaders was inspired by anything like anti-democratic leanings<sup>8</sup>. It is not unlikely that he demanded (like Plato) that the best should rule, which would have meant, in his view, the wisest, or those who knew something about justice. But we must remember that by 'justice' he meant equalitarian justice (as indicated by the passages from the *Gorgias* quoted in the last chapter), and that he was not only an equalitarian but also an individualist—perhaps the greatest apostle of an individualistic ethics of all time. And we should realize that, if he demanded that the wisest men should rule, he clearly stressed that he did not mean the learned men ; in fact, he was sceptical of all professional learnedness, whether it was that of the philosophers of the past or of the learned men of his own generation, the Sophists. The wisdom he meant was of a different kind. It was simply the realization : how little do I know ! Those who did not know this, he taught, knew nothing at all. (This is the true scientific spirit. Some people still think, as Plato did when he had established himself as a learned Pythagorean sage<sup>9</sup>, that Socrates' agnostic attitude must be explained by the lack of success of the science of his day. But this only

shows that they do not understand this spirit, and that they are still possessed by the pre-Socratic magical attitude towards science, and towards the scientist, whom they consider as a somewhat glorified shaman, as wise, learned, initiated. They judge him by the amount of knowledge in his possession, instead of taking, with Socrates, his awareness of what he does not know as a measure of his scientific level as well as of his intellectual honesty.)

It is important to see that this Socratic intellectualism is decidedly equalitarian. Socrates believed that everyone can be taught ; in the *Meno*, we see him teaching a young slave a version <sup>10</sup> of the now so-called theorem of Pythagoras, in an attempt to prove that any uneducated slave has the capacity to grasp even abstract matters. And his intellectualism is also anti-authoritarian. A technique, for instance rhetoric, may perhaps be dogmatically taught by an expert, according to Socrates ; but real knowledge, wisdom, and also virtue, can be taught only by a method which he describes as a form of midwifery. Those eager to learn may be helped to free themselves from their prejudice ; thus they may learn self-criticism, and that truth is not easily attained. But they may also learn to make up their minds, and to rely, critically, on their decisions, and on their insight. In view of such teaching, it is clear how much the Socratic demand (if he ever raised this demand) that the best, i.e. the intellectually honest, should rule, differs from the authoritarian demand that the most learned, or from the aristocratic demand that the best, i.e. the most noble, should rule. (Socrates' belief that even courage is wisdom can, I think, be interpreted as a direct criticism of the aristocratic doctrine of the nobly born hero.)

But this moral intellectualism of Socrates is a two-edged sword. It has its equalitarian and democratic aspect, which was later developed by Antisthenes. But it has also an aspect which may give rise to strongly anti-democratic tendencies. Its stress upon the need for enlightenment, for education, might easily be misinterpreted as a demand for *authoritarianism*. This is connected with a question which seems to have puzzled Socrates a great deal : that those who are not sufficiently educated, and thus not wise enough to know their deficiencies, are just those who are in the greatest need of education. Readiness to learn in itself proves the possession of wisdom, in fact all the wisdom claimed by Socrates for himself ; for he who is ready to learn knows how little he knows. The uneducated seems thus

to be in need of an authority to wake him up, since he cannot be expected to be self-critical. But this one element of authoritarianism was wonderfully balanced in Socrates' teaching by the emphasis that the authority must not claim more than that. The true teacher can prove himself only by exhibiting that self-criticism which the uneducated lacks. 'Whatever authority I may have rests solely upon my knowing how little I know': this is the way in which Socrates might have justified his mission to stir up the people from their dogmatic slumber. This educational mission he believed to be also a political mission. He felt that the way to improve the political life of the city was to educate the citizens to self-criticism. In this sense he claimed to be 'the only politician of his day'<sup>11</sup>, in opposition to those others who flatter the people instead of furthering their true interests.

This Socratic identification of his educational and political activity could easily be distorted into the Platonic and Aristotelian demand that the state should look after the moral life of its citizens. And it can easily be used for a dangerously convincing proof that all democratic control is vicious. For how can those whose task it is to educate be judged by the uneducated? How can the better be controlled by the less good? But this argument is, of course, entirely un-Socratic. It assumes an authority of the wise and learned man, and goes far beyond Socrates' modest idea of the teacher's authority as founded solely on his consciousness of his own limitations. State-authority in these matters is liable to achieve, in fact, the exact opposite of Socrates' aim. It is liable to produce dogmatic self-satisfaction and massive intellectual complacency, instead of critical dissatisfaction and eagerness for improvement. I do not think that it is unnecessary to stress this danger which is seldom clearly realized. Even an author like Crossman, who, I believe, understood the true Socratic spirit, agrees<sup>12</sup> with Plato in what he calls Plato's third criticism of Athens: '*Education, which should be the major responsibility of the State, had been left to individual caprice . . . Here again was a task which should be entrusted only to the man of proven probity. The future of any State depends on the younger generation, and it is therefore madness to allow the minds of children to be moulded by individual taste and force of circumstances. Equally disastrous had been the State's *laissez faire* policy with regard to teachers and schoolmasters and sophist-lecturers.*'<sup>13</sup> But the Athenian state's *laissez faire* policy, criti-

cized by Crossman and Plato, had the invaluable result of enabling certain sophist-lecturers to teach, and especially the greatest of them all, Socrates. And when this policy was later dropped, the result was Socrates' death. This should be a warning that state control in such matters is dangerous, and that the cry for the 'man of proven probity' may easily lead to the suppression of the best. (Bertrand Russell's recent suppression is a case in point.) But as far as basic principles are concerned, we have here an instance of the deeply rooted prejudice that the only alternative to *laissez faire* is full state responsibility. I certainly believe that it is the responsibility of the state to see that its citizens are given an education enabling them to participate in the life of the community, and to make use of any opportunity to develop their special interests and gifts; and the state should certainly also see (as Crossman rightly stresses) that the lack of 'the individual's capacity to pay' should not debar him from higher studies. This, I believe, belongs to the state's protective functions. To say, however, that 'the future of the state depends on the younger generation, and that it is therefore madness to allow the minds of children to be moulded by individual taste', appears to me to open wide the door to totalitarianism. State interest must not be lightly invoked to defend measures which may endanger the most precious of all forms of freedom, namely, intellectual freedom. And although I do not advocate '*laissez faire* with regard to teachers and schoolmasters', I believe that this policy is infinitely superior to an authoritative policy that gives officers of the state full powers to mould minds, and to control the teaching of science, thereby backing the dubious authority of the expert by that of the state, ruining science by the customary practice of teaching it as an authoritative doctrine, and destroying the scientific spirit of inquiry—the spirit of the search for truth, as opposed to the belief in its possession.

I have tried to show that Socrates' intellectualism was fundamentally equalitarian and individualistic, and that the element of authoritarianism which it involved was reduced to a minimum by Socrates' intellectual modesty and his scientific attitude. The intellectualism of Plato is very different from this. The Platonic 'Socrates' of the *Republic*<sup>14</sup> is the embodiment of an unmitigated authoritarianism. (Even his self-deprecating remarks are not based upon awareness of his limitations, but are rather an ironical way of asserting his superiority.) His educational aim is not the awakening of self-criticism and of critical thought in general.

It is, rather, indoctrination—the moulding of minds and of souls which (to repeat a quotation from the *Laws* <sup>15</sup>) are ‘to become, by long habit, utterly incapable of doing anything at all independently’. And Socrates’ great equalitarian and liberating idea that it is possible to reason with a slave, and that there is an intellectual link between man and man, a medium of universal understanding, namely, ‘reason’, this idea is replaced by a demand for an educational monopoly of the ruling class, coupled with the strictest censorship, even of oral debates.

Socrates had stressed that he was not wise; that he was not in the possession of truth, but that he was a searcher, an inquirer, a lover of truth. This, he explained, is expressed by the word ‘philosopher’, i.e. the lover of wisdom, and the seeker for it, as opposed to ‘Sophist’, i.e. the professionally wise man. If ever he claimed that statesmen should be philosophers, he could only have meant that, burdened with an excessive responsibility, they should be searchers for truth, and conscious of their limitations.

How did Plato convert this doctrine? At first sight, it might appear that he did not alter it at all, when demanding that the sovereignty of the state should be invested in the philosophers; especially since, like Socrates, he defined philosophers as lovers of truth. But the change made by Plato is indeed tremendous. His lover is no longer the modest seeker, he is the proud possessor of truth. A trained dialectician, he is capable of intellectual intuition, i.e. of seeing, and of communicating with, the eternal, the heavenly Forms or Ideas. Placed high above all ordinary men, he is ‘god-like, if not . . . divine’ <sup>16</sup>, both in his wisdom and in his power. Plato’s ideal philosopher approaches both to omniscience and to omnipotence. He is the Philosopher-King. It is hard, I think, to conceive a greater contrast than that between the Socratic and the Platonic ideal of a philosopher. It is the contrast between two worlds—the world of a modest, rational individualist and that of a totalitarian demi-god.

Plato’s demand that the wise man should rule—the possessor of truth, the ‘fully qualified philosopher’ <sup>17</sup>—raises, of course, the problem of selecting and educating the rulers. In a purely personalist (as opposed to an institutional) theory, this problem might be solved simply by declaring that the wise ruler will in his wisdom be wise enough to choose the best man for his successor. This is not, however, a very satisfactory approach to the problem. Too much would depend on uncontrolled circumstances; an accident may destroy the future stability of the state.

But the attempt to control circumstances, to foresee what might happen and to provide for it, must lead here, as everywhere, to the abandonment of a purely personalist solution, and to its replacement by an institutional one. As already stated, the attempt to plan for the future must always lead to institutionalism.

## v

The institution which according to Plato has to look after the future leaders can be described as the educational department of the state. It is, from a purely political point of view, by far the most important institution within Plato's society. It holds the keys to power. For this reason alone it should be clear that at least the higher grades of education are to be directly controlled by the rulers. But there are some additional reasons for this. The most important is that only 'the expert and . . . the man of proven probity', as Crossman puts it, which in Plato's view means only the very wisest adepts, that is to say, the rulers themselves, can be entrusted with the final initiation of the future sages into the higher mysteries of wisdom. This holds, above all, for dialectics, i.e. the art of intellectual intuition, of visualizing the divine originals, the Forms or Ideas, of unveiling the Great Mystery behind the common man's everyday world of appearances.

What are Plato's institutional demands regarding this highest form of education? They are remarkable. He demands that only those who are past their prime of life should be admitted. 'When their bodily strength begins to fail, and when they are past the age of public and military duties, then, and only then, should they be permitted to enter at will the sacred field. . .' <sup>18</sup> namely, the field of the highest dialectical studies. Plato's reason for this amazing rule is clear enough. He is afraid of the power of thought. 'All great things are dangerous' <sup>19</sup> is the remark by which he introduces the confession that he is afraid of the effect which philosophic thought may have upon brains which are not yet on the verge of old age. (All this he puts into the mouth of Socrates, who died in defence of his right of free discussion with the young.) But this is exactly what we should expect if we remember that Plato's fundamental aim was to arrest political change. In their youth, the members of the upper class shall fight. When they are too old to think independently, they shall become dogmatic students to be imbued with wisdom and authority in order to become sages themselves and to hand on

their wisdom, the doctrine of collectivism and authoritarianism, to future generations.

It is interesting that in a later and more elaborate passage which attempts to paint the rulers in the brightest colours, Plato modifies his suggestion. Now <sup>20</sup> he allows the future sages to begin their preparatory dialectical studies at the age of thirty, stressing, of course, 'the need for great caution' and the dangers of 'insubordination . . . which corrupts so many dialecticians'; and he demands that 'those to whom the use of arguments may be permitted must possess disciplined and well-balanced natures'. This alteration certainly helps to brighten the picture. But the fundamental tendency is the same. For, in the continuation of this passage, we hear that the future leaders must not be initiated into the higher philosophical studies—into the dialectic vision of the essence of the Good—before they reach, having passed through many tests and temptations, the age of fifty.

This is the teaching of the *Republic*. It seems that the dialogue *Parmenides* <sup>21</sup> contains a similar message, for here Socrates is depicted as a brilliant young man who, having dabbled successfully in pure philosophy, gets into serious trouble when asked to give an account of the more subtle problems of the theory of ideas. He is dismissed by the old Parmenides with the admonition that he should train himself more thoroughly in the art of abstract thought before venturing again into the higher field of philosophical studies. It looks as if we had here (among other things) Plato's answer—'Even a Socrates was once too young for dialectics'—to his pupils who pestered him for an initiation which he considered premature.

Why is it that Plato does not wish his leaders to have originality or initiative? The answer, I think, is clear. He hates change and does not want to see that re-adjustments may become necessary. But this explanation of Plato's attitude does not go deep enough. In fact, we are faced here with a fundamental difficulty of the leader principle. The very idea of selecting or educating future leaders is self-contradictory. You may solve the problem, perhaps, to some degree in the field of bodily excellence. Physical initiative and bodily courage are perhaps not so hard to ascertain. But the secret of intellectual excellence is the spirit of criticism; it is intellectual independence. And this leads to difficulties which must prove insurmountable for any kind of authoritarianism. The authoritarian will in general select those who obey, who believe, who respond to his influence. But in doing

so, he is bound to select mediocrities. For he excludes those who revolt, who doubt, who dare to resist his influence. Never can an authority admit that the intellectually courageous, i.e. those who dare to defy his authority, may be the most valuable type. Of course, the authorities will always remain convinced of their ability to detect initiative. But what they mean by this is only a quick grasp of their intentions, and they will remain for ever incapable of seeing the difference. (Here we may perhaps penetrate the secret of the particular difficulty of selecting capable military leaders. The demands of military discipline enhance the difficulties discussed, and the methods of military advancement are such that those who do dare to think for themselves are usually eliminated. Nothing is less true, as far as intellectual initiative is concerned, than the idea that those who are good in obeying will also be good in commanding<sup>22</sup>. Very similar difficulties arise in political parties : the 'Man Friday' of the party leader is seldom a capable successor.)

We are led here, I believe, to a result of some importance, and to one which can be generalized. Institutions for the selection of the outstanding can hardly be devised. Institutional selection may work quite well for such purposes as Plato had in mind, namely for arresting change. But it will never work well if we demand more than that, for it will always tend to eliminate initiative and originality, and, more generally, qualities which are unusual and unexpected. This is not a criticism of political institutionalism. It only re-affirms what has been said before, that we should always prepare for the worst leaders, although we should try, of course, to get the best. But it is a criticism of the tendency to burden institutions, especially educational institutions, with the impossible task of selecting the best. This should never be made their task. This tendency transforms our educational system into a race-course, and turns a course of studies into a hurdle-race. Instead of encouraging the student to devote himself to his studies for the sake of studying, instead of encouraging in him a real love for his subject and for inquiry<sup>23</sup>, he is encouraged to study for the sake of his personal career ; he is led to acquire only such knowledge as is serviceable in getting him over the hurdles which he must clear for the sake of his advancement. In other words, even in the field of science, our methods of selection are based upon an appeal to personal ambition of a somewhat crude form. (It is a natural reaction to this appeal if the eager student is looked upon with suspicion by his colleagues.)



The impossible demand for an institutional selection of intellectual leaders endangers the very life not only of science, but of intelligence.

It has been said, only too truly, that Plato was the inventor of both our secondary schools and our universities. I do not know a better argument for an optimistic view of mankind, no better proof of their indestructible love for truth and decency, of their originality and stubbornness and health, than the fact that this devastating system of education has not utterly ruined them. In spite of the treachery of so many of their leaders, there are quite a number, old as well as young, who are decent, and intelligent, and devoted to their task. 'I sometimes wonder how it was that the mischief done was not more clearly perceptible,' says Samuel Butler <sup>24</sup>, 'and that the young men and women grew up as sensible and goodly as they did, in spite of the attempts almost deliberately made to warp and stunt their growth. Some doubtless received damage, from which they suffered to their life's end; but many seemed little or none the worse, and some almost the better. The reason would seem to be that the natural instinct of the lads in most cases so absolutely rebelled against their training, that do what the teachers might they could never get them to pay serious heed to it.'

It may be mentioned here that, in practice, Plato did not prove too successful as a selector of political leaders. I have in mind not so much the disappointing outcome of his experiment with Dionysius the Younger, tyrant of Syracuse, but rather the participation of Plato's Academy in Dio's successful expedition against Dionysius. Plato's famous friend Dio was supported in this adventure by a number of members of Plato's Academy. One of them was Callippus, who became Dio's most trusted comrade. After Dio had made himself tyrant of Syracuse he ordered Heraclides, his ally (and perhaps his rival), to be murdered. Shortly afterwards he was himself murdered by Callippus who usurped the tyranny, which he lost after thirteen months. (He was, in turn, murdered by the Pythagorean philosopher Leptines.) But this event was not the only one of its kind in Plato's career as a teacher. Clearchus, one of Plato's (and of Isocrates') disciples, made himself tyrant of Heraclea after having posed as a democratic leader. He was murdered by his relation, Chion, another member of Plato's Academy. (We cannot know how Chion, whom some represent as an idealist, would have developed, since he was soon killed.) These and a few

similar experiences of Plato's <sup>25</sup>—who could boast a total of at least nine tyrants among his one-time pupils and associates—throw light on the peculiar difficulties connected with the selection of men who are to be invested with absolute power. It is hard to find a man whose character will not be corrupted by it. As Lord Acton says—all power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

To sum up. Plato's political programme was much more institutional than personalist ; he hoped to arrest political change by the institutional control of succession in leadership. The control was to be educational, based upon an authoritarian view of learning—upon the authority of the learned expert, and ' the man of proven probity '. This is what Plato made of Socrates' demand that a responsible politician should be a lover of truth and of wisdom rather than an expert, and that he was wise only <sup>26</sup> if he knew his limitations.