

IS IT WRONG TO CALL PLATO A UTILITARIAN?¹

So perverse a title invites the question 'why should anyone ever think of calling Plato a utilitarian?' Yet the term has been applied to him, most recently by Robin Barrow,² and a comparison of Plato with the utilitarians can, I believe, illuminate important features of his ethical thinking.

I

The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure.

Such is John Stuart Mill's succinct exposition of the core of utilitarian theory.³ A contemporary philosopher has aptly described utilitarianism as 'the combination of two principles: (1) *the consequentialist principle* that the rightness, or wrongness, of an action is determined by the goodness, or badness, of the results that flow from it and (2) *the hedonist principle* that the only thing that is good in itself is pleasure and the only thing bad in itself is pain.'⁴ Although the consequentialist principle has attracted the most attention in modern discussions of utilitarianism,⁵ it is the second principle which invites immediate comparison with the views of Plato. I propose therefore to start by comparing the Platonic and the utilitarian conceptions of the good in the hope that this will enable us to see too in what sense Plato's position is consequentialist, and whether his ethical and political theories in general can properly be described as utilitarian.

Three concepts predominate in the utilitarian account of what is good — those of pleasure, happiness, and utility, utility being defined as that which is productive of happiness.⁶ In relation to the last two of these there are what look like strong reasons for ranging Plato alongside the utilitarians in his view of the good. This is particularly so in the case of 'happiness' (assuming that we consider that term adequately to translate *εὐδαιμονία*, a point to which I shall recur). Indeed, Barrow's chief ground for calling Plato a utilitarian is that 'Plato is quite explicit that the aim of the arrangements of the Republic is to ensure "the greatest hap-

¹ I wish to acknowledge valuable advice from Mr. J. R. Bambrough, Professor J. H. Benson, Dr. J. P. Glayton, and Dr. G. J. P. O'Daly; also from Professor A. A. Long and the paper's anonymous referee; none of these persons, however, should be held responsible for the views here expressed.

² In his acute and challenging study *Plato, Utilitarianism and Education* (International Library of the Philosophy of Education, London, 1975).

³ J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ch. II (Fontana ed., ed. Mary Warnock, p. 257).

⁴ A. Quinton, *Utilitarian Ethics* (New Studies in Ethics, Macmillan, 1973) p. 1.

⁵ See especially Bernard Williams in J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utili-*

tarianism For and Against (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 82 ff.

⁶ See, in addition to the passage from Mill quoted above, Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, ch. I, § I, opening sentences: 'Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as determine what we shall do', and the reference later in the section to 'the principle of *utility*', to which a later note is added in the author's final edition 'To this denomination has of late been added, or substituted, the *greatest happiness* or *greatest felicity* principle'.

piness of the city as a whole" ⁷; and not only in the *Republic* but throughout his works, Plato assumes that to say of an action or a way of life that it will make the agent *eudaimōn* is to recommend that action or way of life in a manner that is (save in one respect) unchallengeable. Thus in the *Gorgias* Socrates is concerned to establish that no unjust man can be *eudaimōn* and that the unjust man is more *ἄθλιος* if he goes unpunished than if he is punished; ⁸ at the beginning of the *Philebus* Socrates and Protarchus agree that in seeking the good they are both seeking a 'condition and disposition of soul which can provide the happy life for all men'; ⁹ and in the *Republic* the whole enquiry into the question whether justice is good is seen as being also an enquiry into whether justice makes a man *eudaimōn*. ¹⁰ The exception which Plato makes to this general assumption is entirely in accord with Benthamite principles — namely that the Guardians must not prefer their own *eudaimonía* to that of the community as a whole, and that the philosopher-kings must therefore be prepared temporarily to forgo their philosophic activities and 'return to the cave' to undertake governmental chores (4. 419 a – 421 c; 7. 520 a – d).

If we turn to the notion of 'utility' — a term which the utilitarians themselves might be accused of employing in a rather strained sense ¹¹ — there is little evidence that Plato thought that considerations of 'utility' ever conflicted with or were irrelevant to the nature of what is good. It is rather his practice to use terms which might be translated as 'advantage', 'expedient', 'profitable' in a sense which implies that the things to which they refer either are themselves good, or are productive of what is good, and to suggest that any application of them to objects which do not conform to these criteria is improper. There are four main terms (along with their cognates) which are in question here; they are (to cite each in the grammatical form in which it most frequently occurs) *ὠφελία*, *λυσittelei*, *συμφέρει*, and *κέρδος*, ¹² and with the first three the value of anything to which the terms are thought properly to apply remains unquestioned. ¹³ Uses of *κέρδος* are more variable; while the term and its cognates are often used to

⁷ Op. cit. (n. 2), p. 49. Barrow argues with some success against K. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies* Vol. 1, *The Spell of Plato*, pp. 169 ff., that aiming at the happiness of the whole does not necessarily mean something different from aiming at the happiness of all the members of the whole.

⁸ 470 d ff. and *passim*. 'Ἀθλιότης is always treated as the opposite of *eudaimonía*.

⁹ 11 d, ἔξω ψυχῆς καὶ διάθεσιν . . . τινα . . . τὴν δυναμένην ἀνθρώποις πᾶσι τὸν βίον εὐδαιμόνα παρέχειν.

¹⁰ See e.g. 1. 352 d, 354 a; 4. 427 d; 5. 472 c; 9. 576 e.

¹¹ See Mill's irritation (*Utilitarianism*, p. 256, Fontana ed.) with 'the ignorant blunder of supposing that those who stand up for utility as the test of right and wrong, use the term in that restricted and merely colloquial sense in which utility is opposed to pleasure'. It is doubtful whether Plato, any more than twentieth-century philosophers, would have regarded a sense which

was 'merely colloquial' as calling for such contemptuous treatment.

¹² Note especially the listing of the four terms at *Cratylus* 416 e – 417 a, ταῦτα τὰ περὶ τὸ ἀγαθὸν τε καὶ καλόν, συμφέροντά τε καὶ λυσitteλοῦντα καὶ ὠφέλιμα καὶ κερδαλέα καὶ τὰναντία τούτων. Cf. *Republic* 1. 336 c – d. The word *χρήσιμος* which might seem etymologically more akin to 'useful' is rarer, and can have a more neutral sense. See especially *Hippias Major* 295 b – 296 e, where its potentiality for good or bad is contrasted with the unambiguous nature of τὸ ὠφέλιμον, defined there as τὸ ποιοῦν ἀγαθόν.

¹³ There is, however, a distinction implied by Aristotle between *καλόν* and *ὠφέλιμον* in this account of the *μεγαλόψυχος* which seems likely to reflect popular usage; the 'great-souled' man is described as οἷος κεκτῆσθαι μᾶλλον τὰ καλὰ καὶ ἄκαρπα τῶν καρπύμων καὶ ὠφελίμων (*E.N.* 4, 1125^a11–12). For Aristotle's usage in general see n. 19 below.

assert the unquestioned value of that to which they are applied, they are sometimes used pejoratively of financial or mercenary profit.¹⁴ But in general Plato shows no more inclination than do the utilitarians to suppose that anything that can be judged truly useful can be supposed to be other than good, or at least productive of good.¹⁵

The utilitarian view of the good is also reflected in Plato's frequent insistence that one of the most important features of the good is that it is the object of human desire. In the very passage of the *Republic* (6. 504 e – 506 a) in which the nature of the Form of the Good is directly discussed, Socrates, after noting a difference of opinion among people as to what the good is (the many thinking that it is pleasure, the smarter people that it is wisdom), goes on to point out (505 d) that it is evident that while many would choose to do and possess what merely *seems* just and honourable, even if it really is not so, no one is content to obtain what merely appears good, but everyone seeks what really is good, here in every case already showing disrespect for the appearance;¹⁶ similarly in the *Philebus* (20 d) when considering the conditions needing to be satisfied by anything claiming to be τὸ ἀγαθόν, Socrates asserts not only that τὸ ἀγαθόν must be 'complete' (τέλειον) and adequate (ἰκανόν), but that its most essential quality must be that 'every creature that knows it hunts it and desires it wishing to grasp it and obtain it for itself'.¹⁷ What is good is thus assumed to be desirable not just in the sense that it *ought* to be desired or even that it *can* be desired but in the sense that it *is* desired; Plato expects most people to mean by 'the good' what

¹⁴ As at *Politicus* 300 a; *Republic* 9. 581 a; *Laws* 7. 831 c. See also the possibly spurious *Hipparchus* where Socrates presses his companion to accept that κέρδος is necessarily ἀγαθόν but where one senses that the identification does some violence to normal usage.

¹⁵ Plato does, however, distinguish at *Republic* 6. 493 c between the 'necessary' and the good, and his use here and elsewhere (e.g. *Republic* 8. 559 a – b) of the term 'necessary' (ἀναγκαῖος), with its apparent connotation of 'necessary for survival', has some affinity with a popular English use of the term 'utilitarian' which Mill would have disowned.

¹⁶ ὥς δίκαια μὲν καὶ καλὰ πολλοὶ ἂν ἔλουντο τὰ δοκούντα, κἂν <εἰ> μὴ εἴη, ὅμως ταῦτα πράττειν καὶ κεκτήσθαι καὶ δοκεῖν, ἀγαθὰ δὲ οὐδενὶ ἐπὶ ἀρκεί τὰ δοκούντα κτᾶσθαι ἀλλὰ τὰ ὄντα ζητοῦσιν, τὴν δὲ δόξαν ἐνταῦθα ἤδη πᾶς ἀτιμάζει. The passage contains, however, some obscurities. It is easy to understand that many would choose merely to seem to do what is καλόν or δίκαιον, but what does it mean to say that they choose merely to seem to possess these? Does it mean 'to possess such things as it is honourable and just for them to possess'? Or, as Cornford's translation implies, 'to possess the qualities of justice and honourableness'? Either way, the Greek is awkward, and the notion of

'possession' seems to be brought in simply to point the contrast with the attitude to τὰ ἀγαθὰ, where 'possession' is an entirely appropriate notion, and πράττειν is not even mentioned – indeed, if ἀγαθὰ πράττειν meant 'do good deeds' the point of the contrast would be lost by introducing it.

¹⁷ πᾶν τὸ γινώσκον αὐτὸ θηρεύει καὶ ἐφίεται βουλόμενον ἐλεῖν καὶ περὶ αὐτὸ κτήσασθαι. As I have translated it, there is an important discrepancy between this and the *Republic* passage. The *Philebus* passage appears to say only that every being *that knows it* seeks the good, whereas in the *Republic* there is an unqualified assertion that *all* seek the good – which Socrates clarifies after the passage quoted by saying that, while every soul pursues the good and does everything for it, souls are at a loss and cannot grasp adequately what it is. Some translators (as J. C. B. Gosling (*Plato: Philebus*, Clarendon Press Series) who, however, admits in his note that the text is ambiguous) treat αὐτὸ as the object of θηρεύει and translate πᾶν τὸ γινώσκον as 'every-thing capable of knowing'. Although this interpretation harmonizes better with the *Republic*, it seems forced Greek to treat γινώσκον as absolute when it is followed by a word in the accusative, and unusual for the weak αὐτὸ to precede the verb of which it is the object.

they want, not what they merely approve. This is borne out by his arguments elsewhere. In establishing in the *Gorgias* (469 – end) to his own if not to Callicles's satisfaction, that doing wrong is worse (*κακίον*) than being wronged, Socrates is not establishing that it is more immoral or disgraceful – Polus at least admits this already – he is establishing that it is more harmful, more disadvantageous to the agent; and the whole of this argument rests on the premise, treated as virtually self-evident, that all men wish for (*βούλονται*) what is good, even though they may be mistaken in their view of what it is (*Gorgias* 466 – 9).¹⁸ The point is further underlined by the close connection which we have noted between *εὐδαιμονία*, *ὠφελία*, and what is good.¹⁹

Now there is of course nothing particularly mysterious or peculiarly Greek about the word 'good' having 'value' rather than 'morality' associated with it when it is applied to things rather than persons. In English no moral judgement is involved in the assertion that the weather, a steak, or (perhaps more arguably) a novel is good: and von Wright is merely reflecting an aspect of normal English usage when he says 'anything which is an – intermediate or ultimate – end of action, can be called a *good* (for the subject in pursuit of the end) . . . anything which is an end of action, can also be said to be a *wanted thing*. Also everything, which is wanted in itself, can be called a good (for the subject to whom it is wanted).'²⁰ The reason why the issue is more arguable in the case of a novel is that a novel both portrays, and is a product of, human action, and it is when the terms 'good' and 'bad' are applied to human actions and human beings that there is liable to be a moral element present in the use of the term.²¹ Up to this point there is no significant difference between the Greek *ἀγαθός* and the English 'good'. There is, however, room for misunderstanding when abstract terms are in question. Firstly, anyone who knows the Greek fondness for using the article with the neuter of the adjective to express a quality will be tempted to translate *τὸ ἀγαθόν* as 'goodness' – a term which tends to be used with a moral significance in English; and secondly the assertion in English that 'justice is good' could very naturally be taken to be the probably tautologous assertion that 'justice is a morally admirable quality'. For these reasons it is easy for the modern reader of

¹⁸ Cf. *Meno* 77 b ff., and see Gosling, *Plato* (Arguments of the Philosophers, London and Boston, 1973) ch. II 'Wanting the Good'.

¹⁹ The uses of these terms in Aristotle in general conform to their uses in Plato and have been usefully discussed by J. L. Austin, 'Ἀγαθόν and Εὐδαιμονία in the *Ethics* of Aristotle' (in *Aristotle: A Collection of Critical Essays* ed. J. M. E. Moravcsik, New York and London, 1968, pp. 261–96; also in J. L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, 2nd edn. (ed. Urmson and Warnock), Oxford University Press, 1970, pp. 1–31) replying to H. A. Pritchard, 'The Meaning of *ἀγαθόν* in the *Ethics* of Aristotle' (in *Moral Obligation*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1949), pp. 40–53; also in *Aristotle*, ed. Moravcsik, pp. 241–60); and by J. L. Ackrill, 'Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*', *Proc. Br. Acad.* (1974), 339–359.

²⁰ *Varieties of Goodness* (London, 1963) 104; von Wright's acute analysis of the uses

and meanings of 'good' does much to illuminate Plato's uses of *ἀγαθός*, although Plato would scarcely accept the view (VG 18) that moral goodness 'is a "secondary" form'. The uses so far treated are discussed in chs. III ('Utilitarian and medical goodness. The beneficial and the harmful. The notions of health and illness') and V ('The good for man').

²¹ I say only 'liable to be a moral element present' to allow for cases where the terms are applied to human skills, for which see von Wright, VG, ch. II 'Instrumental and Technical Goodness'. The influence of these uses of *ἀγαθός* on Plato's conception of goodness has been frequently emphasized, see e.g. J. Gould, *The Development of Plato's Ethics* (Cambridge, 1955), ch. II., and J. R. Bambrough, 'Plato's Political Analogies', in *Plato, Popper and Politics* (Cambridge, 1967).

Plato to fail to observe that when he talks of τὸ ἀγαθόν he is using a term which he does not expect his contemporary readers to regard as primarily moral, and that when he says that 'justice is good' he is not talking tautologically but is asserting a relation between what is morally admirable and what is universally wanted which is *prima facie* not at all unlike the relation which Mill wishes to establish between justice and happiness (*Utilitarianism* Ch. V).

II

The way, then in which Plato uses, and expects his audience to understand, ἀγαθόν, and the clear connection which he assumes between it and εὐδαιμονία, ὠφέλεια, and other cognate terms might well suggest a certain affinity between the ways in which he and the utilitarians view the good. With pleasure, however, the Greek ἡδονή, the situation is very different; the preponderant tendency of the dialogues' arguments is to minimize its value.²² The Platonic Socrates is at great pains in the *Gorgias* (491 e – 499 b) to contest the identification of the good with the pleasurable; in the *Phaedo* (81 a – 84 b) pleasures, along with pains, are castigated as the greatest of obstacles to the philosophic life; the distinction between pleasure and the good is underlined in the *Republic* (6. 505 c – d, 509 a); and after a searching discussion in the *Philebus* the purest pleasures are admitted to only a subordinate place in the good life (66 c ff.). It is true that Plato is sometimes anxious to establish that the virtuous life involves more pleasure than the vicious (*Republic* 9. 580 d – 588 a; *Laws* 2. 662 – 663 c, 5. 732 d – 734 e), and that he suggests that when pleasures are unattended by or unmixed with pain there is nothing wrong with them (*Republic* 9. loc. cit.; *Philebus* 50 e – 53 c). But these considerations do not amount to anything like a case for supposing Plato to equate pleasure with the good.

The only passage which might give us pause is the closing section of the *Protagoras* (351 b – end), in which Socrates quite clearly asserts not only psychological hedonism – the view that everything that a man wants he wants because it involves pleasure – but also ethical hedonism – the view that everything that is pleasuregiving is as such good, and that there is no other end than pleasure and the absence of pain to which one can look in order to determine whether a thing

²² Along with ἡδονή can be taken most uses of the adjective ἡδύς (closer in meaning to ἡδονή than the unenthusiastic term 'pleasant' is to 'pleasure') and the verb ἡδεσθαι – also the verb χαίρειν which is treated as cognate with ἡδονή and, with some difference of nuance,τέρψαις. Plato leaves room for doubt about his view of the extension of the word ἡδονή; although he is prepared, and at times keen, to assert that there are intellectual and philosophic ἡδοναί, he never goes as far as Aristotle's assertion that 'God always enjoys one simple pleasure', ὁ θεὸς αἰεί μίαν καὶ ἀπλὴν χαίρει ἡδονήν (*E. N.* 7. 1154^b26), he is at pains to make clear that pleasure and pain are inappropriate to the gods (*Philebus* 33 b; *Epinomis* 985 a), and he recoils with some horror

from any association of it with the Form of the Good (*Republic* 6. 509 a). In the *Protagoras* Socrates seems to make light (358 a) of the distinctions Prodicus has drawn (337 c) between εὐφραίνεσθαι as intellectual enjoyment and ἡδεσθαι as physical enjoyment but he does so without explicitly including εὐφραίνεσθαι in the terms he mentions as expressive of the notion of pleasure (εἴτε . . . ἡδὺ εἴτε τερπνόν . . . εἴτε χαρτόν), and the distinction between ἡδονή and εὐφροσύνη is more seriously reasserted at *Timaeus* 80 b. At the beginning of the *Philebus* (11 b) the terms listed as denoting pleasure correspond to those listed at *Protagoras* 358 a – τὸ χαίρειν . . . καὶ τὴν ἡδονήν καὶ τέρψιν καὶ δσα τοῦ γένους ἐστί τούτου σύμφωνα.

is or is not good.²³ The difficulties of this passage are those of estimating the degree of seriousness with which the hedonistic thesis is being maintained, and therefore of interpreting the purpose of the whole of this deceptively lucid dialogue. But whether we take it that the passage indicates that Plato went through a hedonist phase,²⁴ or that the views here propounded were those of the historical Socrates,²⁵ or that the argument is in some sense an *argumentum ad hominem*²⁶ – the most plausible way of understanding the passage in my opinion – certainly in no other passage in his works does Plato lend support to a theory of this kind.²⁷

This refusal of Plato to identify the pleasurable with the good at once casts doubt on our alignment of him with the utilitarians and makes it evident that he assumes a very different relation between *ἡδονή* and *εὐδαιμονία* from that which they assume between pleasure and happiness; indeed even a cursory reading of the *Gorgias* or the *Republic*, or for that matter of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, will reveal that the question whether *ἡδονή* is an important, an invariable but unimportant, or even an optional element in *εὐδαιμονία* is very much an open question and one which is often discussed, being virtually inseparable from the question 'is pleasure *ἀγαθόν*?' As far as English is concerned, it is no doubt the case that Bentham, at least,²⁸ over-simplified the relation of pleasure to happiness by supposing that, given an absence of countervailing pain, the accumulation of a sufficient amount of pleasure, whether in poetry or pushpin, can constitute happiness.²⁹ But although the implications of the word 'happiness' in English remain to some extent controversial, I find it hard to escape the conclusion that

²³ See Jussi Tenkku, *The Evaluation of Pleasure in Plato's Ethics* (Acta Philosophica Fennica XI, 1956), pp. 36–9; J. P. Sullivan, 'The Hedonism in Plato's *Protagoras*', *Phronesis* 6 (1961), 10–28, especially 19–20. Socrates is of course asserting egocentric hedonism, not utilitarianism here, although Mill clearly has this passage in mind when he talks at the beginning of *Utilitarianism* of 'the youth Socrates' asserting 'the theory of utilitarianism against the popular morality of the so-called sophist', cf. his comment (*Four Dialogues of Plato*, Translation and Notes by J. S. Mill, ed. Ruth Borchard, London, 1946, p. 65) that 'the principle of utility is as broadly stated and as emphatically maintained against Protagoras by Socrates in the dialogue as it ever was by Epicurus or Bentham'.

²⁴ Thus R. Hackforth, 'The Hedonism in Plato's *Protagoras*', *CQ* 22 (1928), 39–42; E. R. Dodds, *Plato, The Gorgias* (1959), p. 21 n. 3; G. Vlastos, Introduction to *Plato: Protagoras* tr. B. Jowett, ed. M. Ostwald, p. xl n. 50.

²⁵ Thus J. and A. M. Adam, *Plato: Protagoras* (Pitt Press, 1893), p. xxxii.

²⁶ Thus A. E. Taylor, *Plato: the Man and his Work* (London, 1926), pp. 260–1; G. M. A. Grube, 'The Structural Unity of the *Protagoras*', *CQ* 27 (1933), 203 ff., and (most

convincingly) J. P. Sullivan, op. cit., who, like J. Moreau, *Construction de l'idéalisme platonicien* (Paris, 1939), pp. 62 ff., compares the scorn for the vulgar exchange of pleasure for pleasure in *Phaedo* 68 a – 69 e.

²⁷ We may agree with Vlastos (op. cit., p. xli) that the views here asserted that 'pleasure is a good' and that 'whatever is best will in fact be the most pleasant' are both consistent with what Plato asserted 'in his mature philosophy', but it is hard to believe that Plato did not see the hedonism he here asserts as going much further than these propositions. See M. J. O'Brien, *The Socratic Paradoxes and the Greek Mind* (Chapel Hill, 1967), pp. 139–40 (n. 22).

²⁸ Mill, by allowing difference of *quality* as well as difference of *quantity* in pleasure to be taken into account has seemed to many to have abandoned a crucial feature of utilitarian theory. See *Utilitarianism* (Fontana ed.), pp. 257–62, and Anthony Quinton, op. cit. (n. 4), pp. 39–43.

²⁹ For the poetry and pushpin comment, see Bentham, *Works* (Tait, Edinburgh, 1843) Vol. 2, pp. 253–4; for a critique of the assimilation of the two terms, see Jean Austin, 'Pleasure and Happiness', in *Modern Studies in Philosophy*, Mill, ed. J. B. Schneewind (London, 1968), pp. 234–50 (originally published in *Philosophy* 43, No. 163).

we talk of it as a quality whose presence in a person is most reliably attested by that person himself; if I say that I am happy, it is difficult, if not impossible, for me to be refuted. A questioner may say to me 'but are you *really* happy?', and I may in the end say 'No, I am not': but if I do in the end say this, it is either because I have changed my opinion as the result of introspection, or because circumstances have arisen since I answered the first question which have changed my feelings. In either case, the verification of the statement of my happiness or unhappiness lies with my own feelings;³⁰ and whether or not this is an accurate reflection of contemporary English usage, there is little doubt that Bentham and Mill understand 'happiness' in this way.

The situation is different with the Greek word *εὐδαιμονία*, and the related terms *ὄλβος* and *μακαριότης*;³¹ it is perfectly logical for a Greek to assert that he is *εὐδαίμων*, and for an outside observer to say 'Oh, no! You are not.' This is a clear implication of the story — so prominent in the Greek conventional wisdom — about Solon's meeting with Croesus,³² where Solon's essential reason for refusing to agree that Croesus is *εὐδαίμων* is that an assertion of *εὐδαιμονία* demands the passing of a judgement on the whole of a man's life. Just, too, as in English it makes sense for a doctor after examining me to contradict and refute my claim that I am healthy, so it makes sense for someone with the prophetic insight of Tiresias to say of Oedipus that he is *ἄθλιος* when this corresponds to nothing in Oedipus' own beliefs and feelings.³³ To put it another way, if my house is burnt down while I am away, I become 'unhappy' when I receive the news, but I become *ἄθλιος* at the moment that the house is burnt. In this respect *εὐδαίμων* is more like our word 'fortunate' — only it does not carry with it that word's suggestion of benefiting from what may be unrelated to one's own actions and achievements³⁴ — or our word 'prosperous' — only it does not have, always, at any rate, that word's associations with wealth and material well-being.³⁵ It in fact refers to a person's overall well-being, and in this respect is almost synonymous with the Greek phrase *εὖ πράττειν* (a point which makes more plausible Aristotle's insistence that *εὐδαιμονία* is an activity).³⁶

³⁰ The point is cogently put by von Wright, *VG*, 99–101. Mrs. Austin (op. cit.) thinks that 'it would be absurd to allow (a man's) own assertion as sufficient grounds' for assessing his happiness (237), and later claims (247) that a number of moral predicates — 'mean, unkind, malevolent, evil' — strike one as *logically* incompatible with happy, and that 'this incompatibility arises from the impossibility of a combination of moral condemnation with a favourable overall assessment'. This does not strike me as true of English usage and I would agree with Barrow (op. cit. n. 2, p. 60) that if it is generally true that unkind people are unhappy, 'it is empirically true'. Barrow's discussion of this question (pp. 52–65) is in the main cogent: his fault lies in supposing the points he makes are equally applicable to *εὐδαιμονία*.

³¹ For useful discussions of these terms see K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in*

the time of Plato and Aristotle (Oxford, 1974), p. 174; C. de Heer, *ΜΑΚΑΡ ΕΥΔΑΙΜΩΝ ΟΛΒΙΟΣ ΕΤΤΥΧΗΣ*. (Amsterdam, 1969); and J. L. Austin, op. cit. (n. 19)), pp. 16–20.

³² Herodotus 1. 29–33. For the familiarity of the story see Aristotle, *E.N.* 1, 1100^a11 ff.

³³ Sophocles *O.T.* 372–3.

οὐ δ' ἄθλιός γε ταῦτ' ὀνειδίζων, ἃ σοὶ οὐδεὶς ὅς οὐχὶ τῶνδ' ὀνειδιεῖ τάχα.

³⁴ And the Greek word *εὐτύχη* more directly corresponds to 'fortunate' or 'lucky'. The man who is *εὐτύχης* is expressly distinguished from the man who is *εὐδαίμων* or *ὄλβιος* by Solon at *Hdt.* 1. 32.7.

³⁵ Although it does frequently have reference to wealth, and it is in this connection that Dover (loc. cit. n. 30) discusses it.

³⁶ See Ackrill's admirable comments, op. cit. (n. 19), pp. 348–9 and cf. J. R. Bambrough's notes 2 and 227 to the revised Everyman translation of the *Republic* by A. D. Lindsay.

Εὐδαιμονία then is a term which describes a man's state or condition, not his feelings; further, the state of εὐδαιμονία is treated as *ex hypothesi* the best state it is possible for a man to be in. Thus the term is *logically* tied to the notion of what is good for a man, so that it is taken to be a necessary implication by everybody who is a party to (almost) any discussion that what is ἀγαθόν will to that extent necessarily contribute to a man's εὐδαιμονία.³⁷ Now this logical tying of εὐδαιμονία to ἀγαθόν, along with the relation which we have already noticed between ὠφελία and ἀγαθόν (see above, pp. 350–1), throws a rather different light on the supposedly utilitarian character of Plato's view of what is good. Whereas the statement 'happiness is good' in English can be seen as a synthetic proposition linking an experienced feeling to a term expressing value, the proposition 'εὐδαιμονία is ἀγαθόν' can be seen as analytic inasmuch as the meaning of the one term is implicit in the meaning of the other. Thus, too, the same moves are open to the moralist in relation to εὐδαιμονία as are open to him in relation to ὠφελία; just as he can argue that, say, wealth is not good, although it is often thought to be so, and can infer from this that it is not really advantageous (which even in English can be treated as synonymous with 'it is not good', at least in one sense of good) so he can argue that it is not really productive of εὐδαιμονία. (Interestingly, Plato tries the same move in relation to pleasure, when he describes the pleasures of food, drink, and sex as 'the so-called pleasures',³⁸ and when he suggests that the only true pleasures are those which are not necessarily preceded by a pain,³⁹ but these moves are less plausible and more refutable because they call for some assent from the respondent's experience, or at least from his belief about somebody's experience).

By showing then the essential coherence in logical terms of εὐδαιμονία, ὠφελία, and ἀγαθόν we have shown nothing at all about what Plato is asserting; indeed it might seem that Plato was deploying these terms with a very different aim from that of the utilitarians. Writing of Epicureanism, A. A. Long has well said 'the pleasure which men should seek (sc. according to Epicurus) is not Bentham's "greatest happiness of the greatest number". Epicurus never suggests that the interests of others should be preferred to or evaluated independently of the interests of the agent. The orientation of his hedonism is wholly self-regarding.'⁴⁰ Whether or not we should regard Plato's ethics as self-regarding, it must be noted that the way in which, particularly in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*, the Platonic Socrates argues for the value of justice, for justice 'being a good', is one which involves the same almost exclusive emphasis on the good of the agent that Long

³⁷ The suitability of εὐδαιμονία is never called in question by the Stoics, see, for instance, Zeno's claim (D. L. 7. 127 = von Arnim, *SVF* 1. 187) about ἀρετή, 'αὐτάρκη εἶναι αὐτὴν πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν'. The only exception to this in Greek moralization that I know of comes at the other end of the ethical spectrum, in the view ascribed by D. L. (2. 87–8 = E. Mannebach, *Aristippi et Cyrenaicorum Fragmenta* (Leiden, 1961) fr. 169) to the Cyrenaics in general (although Mannebach, *op. cit.*, p. 108, thinks the view confined to the late philosopher Anniceris), that only individual pleasures are an end, not εὐδαιμονία: εἶναι τε τὴν μερικὴν ἡδονήν

δι' αὐτὴν αἰρετήν. τὴν δ' εὐδαιμονίαν οὐ δι' αὐτὴν ἀλλὰ διὰ τὰς κατὰ μέρος ἡδονάς.

³⁸ τὰς ἡδονὰς καλουμένας τὰς τοιάσδε, *Phaedo* 64 d.

³⁹ *Rep.* 9. 583 b – 587 c, and cf. the notion of false pleasures in *Phil.* 36 c ff.

⁴⁰ A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy* (London, 1974), p. 69. Interestingly, however, Mill is happy to count Epicurus as a utilitarian (passage cited above, n. 23, and cf. the reference in the first paragraph of ch. II of *Utilitarianism* to 'every writer, from Epicurus to Bentham, who maintained the theory of utility'.)

observes in Epicurean hedonism. In the *Gorgias*, doing wrong is worse for the agent than being wronged; and even more emphatically when he is talking about the justice of the individual in the *Republic* he is concerned to establish that justice is of value to the person who practises it, not just to the community at large — indeed the whole thrust of the *Republic*'s argument on this subject stems from the assertion of Thrasymachus (1. 343 c) that justice is an *ἄλλοτριόν ἀγαθόν*, the good of someone else, and so it becomes a major purpose of Socrates to counter this assertion by showing that justice is a form of 'psychic health'.⁴¹

But, while Plato's apparent preoccupation with the good of the agent contrasts with the utilitarian insistence on the greatest happiness of the greatest number, a more important difference emerges when we consider what are the assumptions and what the significant assertions of each theory. The movement of thought in the early chapters of Mill's *Utilitarianism* could be crudely summarized as follows: we want to know how to decide what is right and what is wrong action; in order to do this we need to discover some principle, some *summum bonum*, in terms of which we can take these decisions; and the principle which answers our needs is the greatest happiness of the greatest number; hence it is right to do those actions which are conducive to this end, wrong to do those which may prevent it. Thus from a position in which he assumes, and expects his readers to assume, the need and obligation for morality, Mill asserts the value to which we should subordinate it and in terms of which we should explain it. In Plato's *Gorgias* and in crucial sections of the *Republic* (and perhaps even more strikingly in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*) the implied movement of thought is the reverse, and could be said to run as follows: we all know that what is good (with which *εὐδαιμονία* and *ὠφελία* are logically involved) is what all men want and seek; in what does it consist, and how is it achieved? To this question the admittedly partial and incomplete answer (which Polus, Callicles, Thrasymachus, Glaucon, and Adimantus all demand at different levels to have demonstrated) is — that it is achieved by, and to some extent consists in, moral virtue, or more specifically justice; a justice which in the *Gorgias* remains undefined, and whose partial definition in the *Republic* (at least in Books 1 – 4) is carried out in terms of functional qualities formally unrelated to the good (although it is not hard for Plato to show that, as he has defined it, it is in fact conducive to, or even constitutes, what is good for man). Thus not only is Plato's assertion that justice is good a synthetic, not an analytic, assertion, relating morality to value; but, whereas Mill is asserting a value to explain the generally admitted need for morality, Plato is asserting the need for morality in order to achieve a value which he takes in some sense to be generally accepted; he is commending morality on the apparently irresistible grounds that without it no man can serve his own true interest; he is asserting and trying to establish a link between what a man wants and what he ought to do, by insisting that the former must be approached and understood by way of the latter.⁴²

At times it is easy to miss, perhaps because of what might seem its banality, this central feature of Socratic and Platonic thought; but it is a distinct theme

⁴¹ For the interpretation of Thrasymachus' challenge see above all G. B. Kerferd, 'The Doctrine of Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic*', *Durham University Journal*

(1947–8), 19–27, especially 25–6.

⁴² This characteristic of Greek moralization is well described by Quinton, op. cit. (n. 3), pp. 11–12.

running from the earliest to the latest of the dialogues.⁴³ In the *Apology* the 'call to virtue'⁴⁴ is particularly strong. Socrates points (29b) to the shameful absurdity of fearing things about which one does not know whether they are good or bad (like death) rather than fearing what Socrates at least knows to be bad and disgraceful (*κακὸν καὶ αἰσχρόν*), namely doing wrong and disobeying someone better than oneself, be he god or man; 'virtue' (*ἀρετή*), he declares a bit further on (30b), 'does not come from money, but money and everything else is made good by virtue'.⁴⁵ The theme is no less prominent in the *Laws*. In the first two books, the emphasis of the Athenian Stranger's educational proposals is on channelling the pleasure- and pain-sense of citizens towards virtue, and convincing them that things that are regarded as beneficial are only in fact beneficial or good for people who are themselves good.⁴⁶ Throughout his writing, we find Plato proclaiming the Socratic message that virtue is good, bridging the gulf which he sees in men's minds between what they want and what they morally admire and approve, and insisting that it is only through the latter that the former is attainable. Plato is thus much less like the utilitarian finding the answer to what we ought to do in the satisfaction of everyone's desires, and much more like the Stoics in their insistence that moral virtue is the only good.

This reconciliation which Plato seeks between what is wanted and what is approved is sometimes presented in a different terminology: the word 'good' (*ἀγαθός*) may appear, as it were, on the other side of the equation. While we may say 'justice is good', we may also say 'the just man is the man who is *εὐδαίμων*', and this in its turn may lead to an equally natural formulation 'the *good* man is the man who is *εὐδαίμων*',⁴⁷ since, as we observed earlier, when applied without qualification to persons, 'good' acquires a moral connotation. Furthermore, as in the educational proposals of *Laws* 2, the word *ἀγαθός* can appear on *both* sides of the equation — 'only for good men are good things truly good'; indeed Plato seems to think that he can establish the truth of these propositions on the grounds that those things which are good must of their very nature make the man in whom they are present good. This, at least, is the way he argues fully

⁴³ See P. Shorey ('Plato's Ethics', a chapter from *The Unity of Plato's Thought* (1903), reprinted in *Modern Studies in Philosophy, Plato, A Collection of Critical Essays* (ed. G. Vlastos) as the first study); B. Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind* (tr. T. G. Rosenmeyer) (Harvard, 1953), ch. 8; and A. W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford, 1960), chs. XII ff.

⁴⁴ The phrase is that used as the title of ch. 8 of Snell's *The Discovery of the Mind* (see previous note).

⁴⁵ Οὐκ ἐκ χρημάτων ἀρετὴ γίγνεται, ἀλλ' ἐξ ἀρετῆς χρήματα καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἀγαθὰ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἅπαντα καὶ ἰδίᾳ καὶ δημοσίᾳ. On the correct translation of this passage, see Burnet (*Euthyphro*, *Apology*, and *Crito* ed. J. Burnet (Oxford, 1924) ad loc.

⁴⁶ 2. 661 c – d, ἐγὼ μὲν γὰρ λέγω σαφῶς τὰ μὲν κακὰ λεγόμενα ἀγαθὰ τοῖς

ἀδίκους εἶναι, τοῖς δὲ δίκαιοις κακὰ, τὰ δ' ἀγαθὰ τοῖς μὲν ἀγαθοῖς ὄντως ἀγαθὰ, τοῖς δὲ κακοῖς κακὰ.

⁴⁷ It was in this form that Aristotle represented Plato as having effected the 'reconciliation', when in his elegies to Eudemus he wrote of Plato that 'he was the only or the first of mortals who clearly showed by his own life and his methods of argument that a man becomes both good and *εὐδαίμων* at the same time'.

ὅς μόνος ἢ πρῶτος θνητῶν κατέδειξεν
ἐναργῶς
οἰκίῳ τε βίῳ καὶ μεθόδοισι λόγων
ὥς ἀγαθός τε καὶ εὐδαίμων ἅμα γίνεται
ἀνὴρ.

Aristotle *Fragment* 673, Rose (3rd edn.), = Ross, *Aristotelis Fragmenta Selecta* (O. C. T.), Carmina 2, p. 146.

and formally in the *Gorgias* and more casually by implication in the *Philebus*.⁴⁸ 'It is through the presence of good things that good men are good', he argues in the *Gorgias*, τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς . . . ἀγαθῶν παρουσίᾳ ἀγαθοὺς; and however many fallacies may be detected in the argument here, and however convincingly subsequent philosophers from Aristotle to von Wright may have argued that there are different kinds of goodness, or denied the priority of moral goodness, it seems unlikely that Plato would have been deflected by their arguments from his point of view that the goodness of things and the goodness of men are intimately connected, and that it is this connection which is at the heart of the relation he is asserting between morality and value.

III

We are now in a better position to judge how far Plato's views conform to the utilitarian principle that the rightness or wrongness of actions can be determined by the goodness or badness of their consequences. In some of his political and social recommendations Plato seems profoundly consequentialist; notoriously, he commends to rulers certain acts of deception which he thinks will be conducive to the *eudaimonia* of the state as a whole, examples of this being the 'lie of the metals' (*Republic* 3. 414 d ff.); the manipulation of the arrangements for sexual intercourse among the Guardians (*Republic* 5. 459 c ff.); and the possibility of a lie about the relation of virtue and pleasure (*Laws* 2. 663 d ff.). But as we can now see there is a crucial constraint on this consequentialism, that the result aimed at, *eudaimonia*, contains virtue as a central element; all of the instances of recommended deception can be represented as designed to achieve the greatest *virtue* of the greatest number. Further, although a consequentialist principle seems to underlie many, perhaps all, of Plato's political and social arrangements, there is no reason to suppose that he saw this principle as a criterion for the rightness and wrongness of all actions; he seems rather to suggest in the *Republic* (4. 443-4) — in a way that anticipates Aristotle's theory of moral virtue — that a right or just action can be defined as one which flows naturally from a just or virtuous disposition. Virtue remains the critical factor inviting further definition and explanation.

The objection might, however, still remain that Plato's commendation of virtue and morality is exclusively egoistical in its appeal, involving consideration

⁴⁸ *Gorg.* 497 d - 499 b; *Phil.* 55 b. In the *Gorgias*, the argument carries conviction with Callicles because he has already declared that a man who is brave and wise is good, and yet a brave man should, if the premiss were accepted *and* the pleasant was the same as the good, have more pleasure than the cowardly man, but in fact he evidently does not. Thus, the identification of the good and the pleasant is refuted *ad Calliclem*, and the way cleared for showing that the good man will also be σώφρων and just. This is a dialogue in which Adkins' distinction (op. cit. n. 43) between co-operative and competitive virtues is particularly relevant and illuminating — Callicles accepts the latter but spurns the former, and fits exactly into

the pattern into which Adkins sees all Greeks as tending to fall. Cf. Dodds (op. cit. n. 23), p. 314, and for a critique of the argument see I. M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines* (London, 1962), i. 231-2, and note his (surely correct) view that 'there is at least an intimate connection in Plato between the goodness of good men and the goodness of good things'. I do not agree with Crombie, however, that 'it is taken for granted that moral goodness is the condition we want to attain to and good things are the things we want to have'. I would say rather that the second of these propositions is taken for granted, and that the first is what Plato is anxious to persuade us of.

only of the agent's *εὐδαιμονία*. In the *Laws*, the Athenian Stranger suggests (2. 663 a – b) that the most persuasive argument in getting people to live a just and pious life is that which 'does not separate the pleasurable and the just, the good and the honourable' (ὁ . . . μὴ χωρίζων λόγος ἡδὺ τε καὶ δίκαιον καὶ ἀγαθὸν τε καὶ καλόν), thus deploying four central terms of his moral terminology. Here ἡδὺ and possibly ἀγαθόν⁴⁹ give the grounds on which what is καλόν and δίκαιον is commended to the mass of Magnesia's citizens, and this is of a piece with Plato's occasional commendation of the just life on hedonistic grounds⁵⁰ and his more habitual insistence that only a moral life is ἀγαθόν. But do the dialogues reveal any other basis for commending what is δίκαιον or καλόν, standing as these terms might here seem to for what is approved and what is admired?

Δίκαιον, the just, comes nearer than any other of these terms to expressing the idea of moral obligation; and we have already seen that the whole structure of the *Republic's* argument implies that justice is the virtue that people might least want to possess since it most clearly involves the forgoing of apparent advantage.⁵¹ Some indeed have maintained that it was not generally admired in itself by fifth-century Greeks, but rather approved and observed through fear of the divine or human retribution that would follow failure to observe it.⁵² I have expressed elsewhere my doubts about this general thesis,⁵³ although I am far from denying a general human tendency to value heroic achievement more positively than those virtues like justice which involve restraint and moderation. But in so far as justice was not just approved but actually admired it was thought of as being part of what was καλόν.

The word καλόν has a range of meanings which can scarcely be covered by a single term in English; but there are basically two: 'beautiful' and 'admirable, splendid, honourable'. The first is applicable when the word is used of persons or things, the second when it is applied to 'actions, behaviour, or achievement'.⁵⁴ It is the second meaning which is obviously relevant in the passage from the *Laws* which we have been considering; and in this sense Socrates' respondents in the early dialogues will readily agree that ἀρετή is καλόν and worth pursuing;⁵⁵

⁴⁹ There is room here for argument as to how the passage is to be understood. Is the Stranger asserting that the correct argument does not separate the pleasurable (ἡδὺ) from the just (δίκαιον), nor the honourable (καλόν) from the good (ἀγαθόν) as is implied by Taylor's translation (Everyman)? Or is he saying that this argument does not separate the pleasurable on the one hand from the just, honourable, and good on the other, as is implied by Saunders' translation (Penguin)? Either translation is consistent with Platonic usage in general, and the context is very double-edged in its guidance.

⁵⁰ See especially *Rep.* 9. 580–8; *Laws* 5. 732 e – 734 e.

⁵¹ Cf. Aristotle *E. N.* 5, 1130³³.

⁵² See above all A. W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility*.

⁵³ 'Moral Values in the World of Thucydides', *CQ N.S.* 23 (1973), 213–31, and see Adkins's reply, 'Merit, Responsibility

and Thucydides', *CQ* 25 (1975), 209–20. Adkins rightly takes me to task (209) for overlooking his valuable note on the notion of justice as helping friends and harming enemies (*MR*, p. 279 n. 6), and for appearing to suggest that he did not appreciate the importance of the co-operative element in competitive virtue, or of the prudential element in σωφροσύνη. But I see no reason to alter my main points, that he has not established that ἀγαθός, καλόν, and ἀρετή are automatically overriding value-terms, and that there is plenty to suggest that a 'quiet' sense of ἀρετή is far from novel in the fifth century. I have never, however, maintained that there are not plenty of uses of ἀγαθός and ἀρετή from which any sense of justice is entirely absent.

⁵⁴ See Dover, (above, n. 31), pp. 69–70 and cf. Dodds (above, n. 24), pp. 249–50.

⁵⁵ *Charm.* 159 c, 160 e; *Laches* 192 c, 193 d; *Prot.* 349 e.

yet for many of them what gives τὸ καλόν value, what makes it ἀγαθόν, is the reputation it secures; as we noticed at *Republic* 6. 505 d, many will be content with what merely appears to be καλόν, irrespective of whether it really is so — an attitude which they would never adopt towards what is ἀγαθόν. This is why, as we have seen, Polus has to be convinced in the *Gorgias* (474 c – 475 e) that doing wrong is not just more disgraceful (αἰσχρόν) but worse (κακίον) than having wrong done to one.

Yet one of the most striking features of the argument with Polus is that Socrates manages at the outset to get Polus to agree that what is καλόν is so either because it is ὠφέλιμον (this, as we know, implying ἀγαθόν) or because it is pleasurable. Once Polus has made this admission he is lost; and he seems to have been induced to make it because καλόν — considerably more than its opposite αἰσχρόν — can be thought of as spanning the gulf between what is wanted and what is admired.⁵⁶ Now elsewhere Plato is anxious to assert that this breadth in the term's use reflects a unity of meaning in all proper applications of the term. In his erotic discourse in the *Symposium* (201 d – 212 c, cf. *Phaedrus* 250 b) it is clear that what is καλόν is wanted in its own right inasmuch as it is the object of ἔρωσ; and at the stage of the soul's erotic ascent at which it has begun to love 'beautiful practices' (καλὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα) — which I take to be moral practices — he will be quite clearly wanting ἀρετή for itself, not just calculating or expecting that it will pay or secure a good reputation. This is borne out by the assertion in the *Republic* (3. 403 c) that moral education ends in the 'love of the beautiful', and by the account in the *Laws* (2. 653 a – 657 b) of the moral and aesthetic educational process as one of accustoming the soul to take pleasure in what is καλόν — where what is καλόν is explicitly defined (655 b) as what is linked with virtue (τὰ . . . ἀρετῆς ἐχόμενα).

There is then a level at which virtue can be commended as καλόν in the sense that it is 'loved' or 'wanted' in itself. The difference between 'loved' and 'wanted' may seem crucial here in determining how far Plato's view of morality has a self-regarding basis. Many have, I think rightly, seen in the erotic discourse in the *Symposium* a depiction, in terms perhaps veiled and subtle, of the change in man's motivation from a desire for mere satisfaction to a more out-going impulse symbolized by the desire to beget and to generate.⁵⁷ But even if we adhere to the term 'want', this does not carry a necessary implication that the want is egoistic: a desire for virtue in itself might seem already to have gone beyond a purely self-regarding approach. This is supported by the indications given in the dialogue of what Plato takes virtue to be.

These can usefully be summarized under four heads:

- (1) Frequently the suggestion is made, and its implications explored, that virtue is in some sense analogous to skill, to excellence at the performance of some function;⁵⁸

⁵⁶ This argument has been well discussed by Adkins (above, n. 43, pp. 266–8), Dodds (above, n. 24, pp. 248–9), and Vlastos ('Was Polus refuted?', *AJP* 88 (1967), 454–60).

⁵⁷ See A. J. Festugière, *Contemplation et vie contemplative selon Platon* (2nd edn. Paris, 1950), pp. 334–57, 454–5; and R. A. Markus in A. H. Armstrong and

R. A. Markus, *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy* (London, 1960) 89–9. Cf. Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London, 1970), pp. 84 ff.

⁵⁸ Above all *Rep.* 1., especially 332 c – 336 a, 352 d – 354 a; also *Prot.* 318 d ff., 354 e ff.; *Hipp. Min.* 373 c ff.

- (2) Not unrelated to this is the even more frequent suggestion that virtue is knowledge, this leading to the question 'What is it knowledge of?' with the answer sometimes suggested 'knowledge of what is good and bad';⁵⁹
- (3) Arising in part from a synthesis of (1) and (2), the good life for man is the practice of philosophy – a practice, however, which should not be engaged in – or perhaps cannot be engaged in – until the virtues have been in some sense acquired by habituation;⁶⁰
- (4) Suggested explicitly only in the *Republic* but clearly of central importance is the view that the end, the goal of human life and philosophy is the grasp of the Form of the Good.⁶¹

The notion that excellence or virtue consists in performing a function well leaves open the question whose purpose the function is meant to be serving; but Socrates insists in *Republic* 1 (341 e – 342 c) that a skill serves the interest not of its practitioner but of that on which it practices; and in Plato's most explicit deployment of this theme (*Republic* 1. 352 d – 354 a) Socrates compares the soul in turn to a pruning-knife, an eye, and a horse; in the case of the first of these, the function is clearly external to the instrument, serving the purpose of the possessor; in the case of the second, the purpose is that of the whole of which the eye forms part; in the case of the horse, the purpose is unclarified, but seems likely to be related in Plato's mind to the horse's serving the ends of man. Plato, it seems, is indirectly suggesting that man serves the purpose of something other than or at least more pervasive than himself, before he goes on to suggest by a piece of equivocation over the phrase 'live well', that the soul's function is living, that it performs the function well by living well and that this in turn implies that the soul which does this also lives 'happily' (εὐδαιμόνως), since this is a natural interpretation of εὖ ζῆν.⁶² This points to a line of prescription which runs – you want to live 'happily' – then live virtuously – and living virtuously involves fulfilling well the function of living, the nature of this function being left vague, as also the purpose that it is meant to serve. But the analogies suggest an external assignation of the function, with the likely implication that the purpose of the function may in part at least be a purpose that is not one's own. This is supported by the ways in which justice is approached and defined in *Republic* 2 – 4. Although the main purpose of the definition seems to

⁵⁹ *Euth.*, *Laches*, *Charm.*, *Prot.* *passim*; for the further question and answer see *Rep.* 6. 505 b; *Laches* 199 c ff.; *Charm.* 174 a – 175 a.

⁶⁰ *Rep.* 6. 484 a – 487 a, 7. 537 e – 539 d (from which it emerges that if not philosophy, at least dialectic *could*, although it *should not*, be engaged in by the immature). Dialectic is here perhaps being separated from philosophy; it is certainly the implication of the general line of argument of the *Phaedo* that true philosophy *requires* the practice of moral virtue.

⁶¹ *Rep.* 6. 504 c – end of 7.

⁶² 353 e – 354 a. The attempt of J. D. Mabbott ('Is Plato's Republic Utilitarian?' p. 63, in *Modern Studies in Philosophy*, *Plato*, ed. Vlastos, Vol. ii) to defend Plato

against a charge of 'fallacious transition' fails to note the crucial switch from a self-orientated to an externally oriented use of 'living well'. The fallacious transition here lies surely in supposing that living well in the sense of performing the function of living well ('instrumental goodness' in von Wright's analysis) is the same as living well in a hedonic or egoistical sense – and, even if we accept Mabbott's view that the εὐδαιμόνων is blessed or fortunate because he lives under divine protection, there is still a step unaccounted for – that the man who lives well 'functionally' will enjoy divine protection; Greek tragedy might appear to abound in examples of men who lived well – justly – and still did not enjoy divine protection.

be to suggest that justice is a sort of internal integration of the soul, with each part of the soul 'doing its own', it is clear that each man also should 'do his own' — where the implications of the phrase are very different from those of the English 'doing one's own thing' in that each man is to do that which it is best that he should do, *not* that which he feels like doing.

When we turn, however, to the determination of the nature of this function, with the emphasis on philosophy and on the realization of one's potential through the apprehension of the Form of the Good, it may seem that the emphasis is more personal and egoistic. Despite the ascetic tone of the *Phaedo*, the philosopher there seems solely involved in his own philosophic progress; and the very emphasis that we have noticed earlier in *Republic* 6 on the inherent desirability of the good — specifically linked here to the Form of the Good — reinforces the impression. Yet the Form of the Good, by its very nature, is not only the purpose, satisfaction, goal of each individual but is that of all, and here we have moved from those goods which are divisible to those which are shared. It is one of the most significant and elusive of the paradoxes of Plato's thought that while all men want the good very few have any idea what it is; and since the practice of philosophy anyway calls for the possession of all the moral virtues, since the approach to philosophy is, the *Symposium* tells us, characterized by *ἔρως* directed at beauty itself, and since Plato goes out of his way in the Great Preamble to the *Laws* (5. 731 e) to condemn self-love, it would seem reasonable to suppose that the attitude Plato is enjoining is more akin to that of the adoring worshipper than to that of the seeker of satisfying experience. It remains true that the argument seems to have returned to its starting-point; seeking to establish in the *Republic* that justice is good (a notion which we saw to be intimately and logically connected with *εὐδαιμονία*), Plato ends up by asserting, with apparent circularity, that the definition of justice as 'doing one's own' is merely provisional, and that the true nature of justice can be understood only in the light of the Form of the Good. But while the argument has in a sense both started and ended with 'the good', its very progress has, for those who have followed it, enlarged and hopefully transformed their perception of what the good is.

IV

What then of the claim that Plato's final ethical and political position conforms to the utilitarian conclusion? We have established that initially Plato is assuming rather than asserting a principle of *εὐδαιμονία*, but is not his final position one in which he is asserting the principle of the greatest *εὐδαιμονία* of the greatest number? We have already seen that it is unlikely that Plato would accept a consequentialist principle for determining the rightness or wrongness of all actions, and that even where he does accept such a principle — in certain areas at least of his political and social arrangements — 'virtue' is part of the desired consequence; and from Plato's hints of the nature of virtue it does not seem that it can be defined in purely consequentialist terms. Furthermore, Plato's political philosophy is always inherently paternalistic; the ideal government will not be seeking to interpret or execute the wishes of the members of the community except in so far as they are confident (and they are!) that they know better than the ordinary citizen what the latter 'really' wants; and their knowledge of what is 'really' wanted will be derived from their study of reality, of the

forms, and in particular the Form of the Good.⁶³ Within this framework, however, the case is strong for saying that the political organization proposed in both the *Republic* and the *Laws* does follow the utilitarian principle of aiming at the greatest *eudaimonia* of the greatest number. In *Republic* 4, as we have noted, Socrates insists that we must aim at the *eudaimonia* of the whole city, not just at that of its rulers; further, Plato seems to go some way towards elucidating what the Benthamite principle leaves undetermined – the question whether it is more important that there should be a maximum amount of happiness in the state, or whether it is more important that it should be shared among a large number; his insistence that there should be no extremes of wealth and poverty (4. 421 c – 423 c) implies a belief that there is a minimum standard below which no one should fall; and, despite the manner in which he seems progressively to forget that the non-philosophic classes exist, it would appear that Plato thinks that those who are not philosophers achieve as much *eudaimonia* as it is in their natures to achieve. I very much doubt, however, in the light of Plato's encomia of philosophy whether we can suppose him to believe that all have equal *eudaimonia*,⁶⁴ since this would surely conflict with his belief that philosophy is the only thing truly worth doing.⁶⁵

This utilitarian impression needs some qualification, however. First, we are told in *Republic* 7 that it is right that philosophers should in turn abandon the prize of philosophy and periodically 'return into the cave' to undertake the tedious chore of government. This is partly disconcerting because, as Adkins well points out,⁶⁶ it spoils the demonstration of the goodness of justice – the practice of justice in this instance, it seems, involves forgoing *eudaimonia*, of which it was the purpose of the argument to establish that justice was an integral part. More disconcerting, however, from an utilitarian point of view is the contention that this is an obligation on the philosopher *only* in an ideal state in which the state has furnished him with his philosophic education (520 a – d); this would seem to imply that the philosopher as such has no obligation to seek the happiness of the greatest number except in the conditions of the ideal state.⁶⁷

Further, despite Plato's apparent commitment to the securing of well-being for the whole community in a way that seems to resemble utilitarian principles, there is some doubt how far down the social scale this commitment really goes. We have already noticed Plato's vagueness about the activities of those outside the two Guardian classes. When we turn to the *Laws* we seem at first to be turning to a community in which the dominant concern is with the moral education (which involves the moral improvement and therefore the greater well-being) of the whole community; and if we are talking of the citizen-body this is

⁶³ On this crucial aspect of Plato's thought and its implications see Dodds (above, n. 24), p. 236. Yet this claim for superior knowledge by the government to override preferences is quite consistent with utilitarianism.

⁶⁴ As Barrow (above, n. 2, pp. 159–64) seems to suppose; even if we admit, as I have argued we should not, that *eudaimonia* is a 'feeling-word' like happiness, Plato still allows that philosophers get more *enjoyment* than others – see especially *Rep.* 9. 580–8.

⁶⁵ *Rep.* 6–7 *passim*; *Phaedo passim*, especially 69. Nor is the principle of equal happiness for all generally seen as essential to utilitarianism; see J. C. Smart in J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 35–7.

⁶⁶ (Above, n. 43), pp. 290–3.

⁶⁷ Plato has, however, emphasized earlier (6. 496–7), as Socrates also does in the *Apology* (31 c – 32 e), the practical impossibility of a philosopher surviving in contemporary society if he engages in politics.

certainly the case. But it is disconcerting to discover in the course of the work that all the artisans and traders of the community (presumably a large proportion of the whole) are to be foreigners, allowed to be resident for a limited period and with their legal rights protected, but without any provision for their education, their morality, or therefore in a Platonically fundamental way for their well-being; and the reason for this is, of course, that trade and manual labour are unsuitable for free citizens who must measure up to the criterion of being able to rule and be ruled; thus in his last work Plato clearly envisages a community economically dependent on those whose *eὐδαιμονία* is not taken into account when the state is constituted.⁶⁸

Apart from this consideration — which is an important one — there is some ground for saying that Plato's political theories make use of the principle of 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' provided we substitute for 'happiness' some term like 'well-being' but the difference is this: Bentham and Mill are propounding their principle as a new insight into the question of what is right and what is wrong, whereas Plato is using the principle as an uncontentious starting-point, and the distinctive character of his theories derives from the interpretation he gives to this *eὐδαιμονία*. Thus in the *Republic* the conditions for attaining *eὐδαιμονία* are only understood through the philosophic study of reality, and the nature of this reality is the principle which determines how this is to be achieved; and thus too in the *Laws* whatever democratic elements there may be in the political processes of election, the laws themselves are under the guardianship of those who study the basic elements of moral virtue — a study which can scarcely be thought of as different from philosophy itself.

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⁶⁸ *Laws* 8. 846 d ff.; 11. 918 a – 920 c, especially 919 c. See G. Morrow, *Plato's*

Cretan City (Princeton, 1960), pp. 138–48. Cf. Aristotle, *Politics* 7, 1328^b33 ff.