

IX.—Spirit, Gentleness and the Philosophic Nature in the Republic

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In comparing a young guardian to a watch-dog, Socrates exploits a conflation of two meanings of *philosophia*, (1) love of knowing, (2) love of the known. The second, not the first, is the basis of the gentle and "philosophic" nature of the dog and of the young guardian. The latter's disposition at the level of feeling and in relation to his fellow citizens is properly called philosophic because it is an anticipation of the philosopher's at the level of thought and in relation to the objects of thought, which are akin to reason in the soul.

In *CR.* 62.2 (Sept., 1948), in a note on "Plato's Philosophic Dog" Professor T. A. Sinclair asks why a *φύλαξ* is like a *σκύλαξ*, and states Plato's argument in a form, which, as he freely admits, would commit Plato to a glaring *non-sequitur*. Then he offers an explanation designed to account for the inconsequence of the argument. This paper is not polemical. I offer Professor Sinclair my apologies for the disputatious tone of what immediately follows, and thank him for providing me with a point of departure for a re-examination of *Rep.* 374D ff. and of certain related passages.

"A *φύλαξ* is like a *σκύλαξ*," says Sinclair, "because a well-bred dog, full of spirit, ready to attack strangers, but always gentle to his own folk, shows the same characteristics as the courageous defender of a city. As a dog must know who are those of his household and who are not, he must have some taste for knowledge. *Therefore* (italics mine) the human *φύλαξ* must have a philosophic as well as a spirited disposition. This is the sort of argument to which Plato's enemies point when they want to show how silly Plato was."

Now to be sure, if Plato's argument did so run, the derision of his enemies (whoever these may be) would be justified. It would be misplaced, however, Sinclair thinks, because, in any case, this is "one of Plato's little jokes," which Plato's friends, knowing him well, do not take seriously. But the point of the joke is not, according to Sinclair, the familiar and homely Socratic comparison. Rather the whole argument is a parody of the nature school of Sophists, and this accounts for its inconsequential nature.

As to this I would observe:

(1) In the passage concerned (*Rep.* 374D ff.), Plato does not give the slightest hint that he is thinking of the views of any individual or group. Though he often neglects, or chooses not, to name the persons whose views he has in mind,¹ it is not in Plato's manner completely to suppress such reference when he intends it.

(2) In the absence of all such reference in the passage on the philosophic dog, the only reason for suspecting parody would be the inconsequential nature of the argument. But inconsequence does not of itself constitute parody. It must be admitted that there are instances of insufficiently cogent argument in the dialogues where no parody is intended. That the tone of the passage in question does not suggest a parody will be clear if we call to mind genuine examples of parody, such as the discussion of the poem of Simonides in the *Protagoras*, or the speech of Agathon in the *Symposium*. If indeed we were to admit that in the passage on the philosophic dog, Plato has in mind the arguments of the nature school of Sophists, we should have to say, not that he is parodying, but, properly enough, applying them to the case of the guardians.

(3) Nor, if we reject the notion of parody, need we charge Plato with being so illogical as to deduce a necessary connection from an analogy. Plato does not in fact argue that *since* the watch-dog is φιλομαθής or φιλόσοφος as well as θυμοειδής *therefore* the guardian must be too. The conclusion² of his analogy is simply that there is a basis in φύσις for the requisite combination of qualities in a guardian which seemed for a moment to be an impossible combination. If Plato's argument is stated as he develops it, its inconsequential character disappears, and with it the need to supply any suppressed reference.

(4) There is, certainly, "a little joke," but *pace* Sinclair, it does consist in "one of Socrates' homely comparisons," which, though presented apologetically or playfully, are always of particularly serious philosophic import. The instances are almost too familiar to recall. The similes of the gadfly in the *Apology*, of midwifery in the *Theaetetus*, the use of larger letters by the short-sighted in the *Republic*, are all examples of this kind of Socratic-Platonic εἰρωνεία. The images of angling in the *Sophist*, of weaving in the

¹ E.g. *Rep.* 358c, 365a; *Theaet.* 156a; *Soph.* 246a, 248a.

² 375E: τοῦτο μὲν ἄρα, ἣν δ' ἐγώ, δυνατόν, καὶ οὐ παρὰ φύσιν ζητοῦμεν τοιοῦτον εἶναι τὸν φύλακα.

Politicus are further illustrations of the same playful or metaphorical approach to serious problems. Even the great simile of the Sun in *Republic* VI is introduced apologetically, and is made the occasion of a pun (*τόκος*, 507A). The "little joke" of the philosophic dog may therefore be expected to suggest matters which Plato takes very seriously indeed.³

Let us briefly review the passage in its context. Socrates has pointed out that it is even more necessary for guardians than for other craftsmen to devote themselves exclusively to their art, since the product of their art is of supreme importance to the community. The greatest care also must be taken to secure natures suitable to the work. The *φύσις* required will not differ, as far as the work of a guardian is concerned, from that of a well-bred dog. Like the dog the guardian must be, in respect of bodily qualifications, strong, swift, of quick perception, and *κατὰ ψυχήν*, in "soul," he must be spirited. For spirit is the temperamental basis of courage (375A), which is the distinctive virtue of defenders of a city (429B). But if the guardians are so constituted they will inevitably be savage to one another and to the rest of the citizens.

We have reached a turning point in the argument. In Book I Socrates has begun to expose the contradictions in the Thrasymachean view which would make the *πλεονεξία* of the strong man the basis of social order, and has made a brave new start in founding the *πόλις* not on an individualistic and anti-social view of man, nor yet on a convention which, though acquiesced in as a *pis-aller*, thwarts and inhibits human nature, but on a natural need of men, one for the other. *ποιήσει δὲ αὐτὴν ἡ ἡμετέρα χρεία* (369C). The wind of the argument, however, has in effect brought Socrates again face to face with the strong man of Thrasymachus, for whom justice is *τὸ τοῦ κρείττονος συμφέρον*. And why? The city in its simplest form, the healthy city, which came into being to supply man's basic needs of food, clothing and shelter, has become inflamed because of his expanding desires. The basis of the *ἀναγκαιοτάτη πόλις* and of the *φλεγμαίνουσα πόλις* alike is purely economic, viz. the most efficient production of the maximum quantity of goods. And now Socrates is to

³ F. M. Cornford writes (in a note *ad loc.* in his translation of the *Rep.*): "The ascription of a philosophic element to dogs is not seriously meant. We might regard man's love of knowledge as rooted in an instinct of curiosity to be found in animals, but curiosity has no connection with gentleness, and for Plato reason is an independent faculty existing only in man and not developed from any animal instinct." This, as I hope to show, is a misreading of the passage.

make us realize that this is not a sufficient basis for community. Unlimited desire for ever more elaborate forms of material good brings war, which creates the need for a class of soldiers who will march out to defend, be it noted, the property and other wealth of the city (374A). They have not yet learned that there is anything else to defend, for, like their fellow-citizens, they are actuated only by *ἐπιθυμία* operating without the regulative *πέρας* supplied by reason. The requisite *θυμοειδές* in their natures will therefore serve only to make their *ἐπιθυμία* more insistent. With a monopoly of arms and of military training these soldiers will of course be stronger than the rest of the citizens. In seeking to satisfy their desire they will inevitably turn and rend their fellow-citizens and one another. "They will not wait for others to destroy them," observes Socrates, "they will do it first themselves" (375c). The purely economic state, we are made to realize, is self-annihilating.

Only, then, if some other principle becomes operative, can a guardian be a guardian or the city survive. Gentleness, *πραότης*, must balance spirit, *θυμός*. This combination of opposite qualities, which appears impossible, does exist in watch-dogs. *Therefore* our requirement does not run counter to nature. We expect Socrates now to re-affirm that in addition to being spirited, a guardian must be gentle. Instead, he says that he must be *φιλόσοφος τὴν φύσιν*. Glauco is puzzled, justifiably enough. It is doubtless true, as Socrates goes on to say, that a creature which welcomes a familiar sight simply because he has learned to know it, and resents an unfamiliar one because he has not, may be said to be *φιλομαθής*. So much does he like to learn, so highly does he prize knowledge, that he governs his conduct by it. But gentleness is not a necessary concomitant of liking to learn, nor is it necessarily evoked by what is familiar. Human creatures at all events, are often the reverse of gentle to those whom they know best. The gentleness which characterizes the watchdog arises, not from his liking to learn, but from his disposition to like the object which he has learned. Socrates however asserts (376B) the identity⁴ of *τὸ φιλομαθές* and *τὸ φιλόσοφον*, and says (376C) that in the case of a human being too (as well as in the case of the dog) the condition of his being *πρᾶος* is that he be *φύσει φιλόσοφον καὶ φιλομαθῆ*. In 376C.4 *φιλόσοφος* is substituted for *πρᾶος* to balance *θυμοειδές*. Evidently in this passage

⁴ *φιλομαθής* and *φιλόσοφος* are, of course, often used quite synonymously, as for example, in *Phaedo* 82c-84a *passim*.

the notions of the "gentle" and the "philosophic" are so closely related as to be almost identical. A later passage confirms this. At 410D τὸ θυμοειδές is said to provide the savage element in character, while the philosophic nature, ἡ φιλόσοφος φύσις, contains the gentle element.

It would appear, then, that in the comparison of the guardian to the watch-dog, a relation between the gentle and philosophic natures is suggested which is not made quite explicit, but which becomes clear later as the conception of the philosopher is deepened. Socrates in fact has exploited a conflation of two distinct meanings of the term φιλόσοφος, (1) a lover of knowing, (2) a lover of what is known. Both are of the essence of the conception of the philosopher, as we see from such a passage as *Rep.* v. 474c–475c, where the emphasis is now (e.g. 475c) on the first meaning, with the full active force of *μανθάνειν* felt in the compound *φιλομαθής*, and again (475b) on the love of the known, the content of *σοφία*. In the passage on the watch-dog, though Socrates begins by inferring the "philosophic" nature of the dog from the first meaning, I suggest that his argument really stems from the second, and it is this which is applicable alike to an animal, to the required attitude in a young guardian to his fellow-citizens, and to the disposition of the philosopher king at the highest level of *παιδεία*.

A glance at the meaning of the opposite quality, τὸ θυμοειδές, in the theory of the tri-partite soul will confirm this view. As to the theory in general, it is well to recall that at the outset of the discussion of it, Socrates disavows all claim to precision or finality for the results he hopes to reach. These will be adequate only to the problems he has just been examining, viz. what sections of the community are characterized by the different virtues, and to the question whether the individual soul has within it "three kinds," *τρία εἶδη* (435c), corresponding to the three kinds of natures in the city. Cornford⁵ to be sure, is mistaken in holding that the structure of the soul is derived analogically in mechanical fashion from the structure of the state. The most that can be admitted is that the notion of three functional groups in the state supplies a clue to the structure of the soul. As W. F. R. Hardie well observes (*A Study in Plato*, p. 143),

"When (Plato) proposed to read the tale of the virtues in the 'large letters' of the city he knew that he would have to justify his analogy

⁵ "Psychology and Social Structure in the *Republic*," *CQ* 6 (1912) 246–265.

with the soul; and must have had psychological reasons for the psychological doctrine."

Neither is the hypothesis of the tri-partite soul to be confused with the modern psychological classification of elements in consciousness, desire, feeling, thought, or affection, conation, cognition.⁶ The hypothesis indeed is elaborated through a discussion of what happens when the desiring and reasoning "parts" are in conflict. But reason and desire cannot, strictly speaking, conflict as elements in consciousness. What do conflict are motives or ends sought by reason as against ends sought by desire. The conflict, as J. L. Stocks truly observes,⁷ is in the will itself, in "a duplicity of will." It may be objected that Plato has needlessly and mistakenly complicated his moral psychology at this point by the introduction of a third will, τὸ θυμοειδές. Hardie writes (*op. cit.* 142)

"The question, then, is whether 'spirit' is the name of a motive different in kind on the one hand from the desire for good supervening on reflection, on the other from the desire for certain specific pleasures. No adequate reasons are given by the discussion in the *Republic* for thinking that this is so, or for modifying the opinion, so strongly held both by plain men and philosophers, that the fundamental division here is into two and not three."⁸

But whatever difficulties may be imported into the problem of the moral struggle by the introduction of τὸ θυμοειδές, and whether or not its independence from τὸ λογιστικόν on the one hand, and from τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν on the other, can in the last analysis be maintained, there is surely a real and broad difference in the kinds of good in which different people seek satisfaction. Some men seek it in the gratification of physical desires, some in ambition or honour, some in learning. The connection of the theory with, if

⁶ This misconception vitiates the treatment of the problem in Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Platon* 2.395, where he speaks of "Vernunft Begierde und Wille." So too Apelt, *Platon, Sämtliche Dialoge* 5.472, says that the Platonic theory may be regarded as "eine Vorstufe zu unserer Dreiteilung in 1. Erkenntnis, 2. Lustfühlen und Begehren, 3. Tatkraft." Grube (*Plato's Thought* 134) speaks of reason, the passions and (rather obscurely) the feelings "as when we speak of saving a person's feelings." He also suggests, with Cornford, for θυμός, "sentiments," which is surely wrong. For a correction of all this see J. L. Stocks, "Plato and the Tripartite Soul," *Mind* N.S. 24 (1915), especially 216 ff.

⁷ *Op. cit.* (above, note 6) 217.

⁸ It may be noted that in another context, in reference to the correction by τὸ λογιστικόν of illusions incident to sense, the division is into two, not three: *Rep.* 602D-603A.

not its origin in, the parable of the Three Lives, each directed to its chosen end, is probable. This provisional account of the structure of the soul may be regarded, then, as a teleological interpretation of its powers in terms primarily of the objects or ends in which it seeks satisfaction or good.⁹

If this be the general purport of the theory, what is the basic conception underlying the various uses of τὸ θυμοειδές, in the *Republic*? Its connection with θυμός in the sense of anger is, of course, made clear by Socrates at the beginning of the discussion. Obviously however the term cannot mean simply "the angry-like part." Jaeger has pointed out¹⁰ that the word first occurs in the Hippocratic treatise *On Airs Waters and Places*, and he has suggested that the notion of the spirited element (though not that of the tripartite soul) is derived from Hippocratic medicine. In view of the very wide connotation of θυμός in earlier writers, it is difficult to be sure of the limits of its meaning in this compound. In Homer, as is well known, θυμός can mean not only anger, but heart, mind, desire, life. Sometimes it denotes the whole complex of consciousness so as to be almost equivalent to "self." Meanings of the term as diverse can be found in writers of the fifth century.

R. L. Nettleship long ago observed¹¹ that in all the various manifestations of "spirit" there is an element of self-assertion and self-consciousness. This suggestion, which Nettleship did not fully develop, and which seems to have been largely neglected by recent scholars, still deserves consideration.¹² It is this core of meaning, I believe, which justifies the use of the term θυμοειδές in the *Republic*

⁹ C. Ritter has seen this, *Platon* 2.450: Allein wir haben schon gesehen dass die fragliche Unterscheidung bei Platon von der Beobachtung der Hauptrichtungen des Strebens ausgeht — nur was in der Seele zum Handeln drängt wird ins Auge gefasst — und so bedeutet sie eine Einteilung der Motive menschlichen Handelns.

¹⁰ "A New Greek Word in Plato's *Republic*," *Eranos* 44 (1946) 123 ff. If Xenophon is to be trusted at this point, Socrates used the word (*Mem.* 4.1.3) in the sense of "spirited" as applied to horses.

¹¹ "The Theory of Education in the *Republic* of Plato" in *Hellenica* (ed. Abbott, London, 1880) 76.

¹² Brandt (*Zur Entw. d. Pl. Lehre v. d. Seelentheilen*, 18), quoted by J. Adam in his note on *Rep.* 439E, speaks of τὸ θυμοειδές as "leidenschaftlicher Selbsterhaltungs — und Selbstvervollkommnungstrieb." Before Nettleship, P. Meyer in his dissertation *ὁ θυμός apud Aristotelem Platonemque* (Bonn, 1876), had concluded thus: "τὸν θυμόν esse eam naturalem vim qua ductus suam quisque propriam naturam explorare studeat, quaecunque hanc naturam ipsi propriam tollere vel laedere conentur, fugiat, quae contra perfectiorem reddere possint, adpetat." This excessive broadening of the notion is not in Plato, though Aristotle contrives to find the seat of hate, love, anger and fear all in θυμός: *Top.* 113A.35 ff., 126A ff.; *Pol.* 1372B.35 ff.

to denote various dispositions and types of conduct which at first sight appear to have little in common, the spirited nature of an animal, the passion of children, righteous indignation, self-respect and ambition.¹³

The *θυμός* of animals (441B) is little more than an instinct of self-preservation: in a child *θυμός* appears as an impulse to assert himself or as rage when he is checked in doing so. In both instances it is devoid of moral quality. This quality however appears in the case, cited by Socrates, of the man who boils at the violation of his personality when he is unjustly punished, but whose *θυμός* is not aroused by just punishment. So, too, when Leontius yields to a morbid desire to gaze on the corpses, his *θυμός* is aroused because the control which should belong to his rational, his true self¹⁴ has been usurped by his desires, represented by his eyes, which he apostrophizes as alien and hostile creatures. ἴδου ὑμῶν ὧ κακοδαίμονες. . . . (440A). But the activity of τὸ θυμοειδές is evident not only in angry protest against infringements of the self, but in realization of positive good proper to this "part" of the soul. At 581B we read that it may be called φιλόνηκον and φιλότιμον since it is wholly set toward mastery, victory and fame. Such satisfactions are clearly different from those of learning on the one hand, and from those of the bodily desires and from desires for material good on the other. They are habitually sought by the ambitious man, the man who desires power, who wants, as we say, to make himself felt. Always, unless it is subject to τὸ λογιστικόν, τὸ θυμοειδές degenerates into αὐθάδεια, obstinate self-will (590A).

Clearly in all these manifestations of τὸ θυμοειδές there is, at

¹³ F. M. Cornford writes (*Rep.* tr. p. 62 note), "The fierceness is characteristic of the spirited element in the soul. This term covers a group of impulses manifested in anger and pugnacity, in generous indignation allied to a sense of honour and in competition and ambition." But to Plato of all people we cannot impute a nominalist point of view. He must have believed that these impulses had something in common to justify the use of a common term to denote them.

¹⁴ That the essential soul or self is identified by Plato with τὸ λογιστικόν is clearly indicated by the image of the composite creature within the enclosure of a human form (*Rep.* 588B), and by the comparison of the soul to the sea-god Glaucus (*Rep.* 611D), whose real nature cannot be discerned until the encrustations of shells and sea-weed have been removed. Whatever may be the implications of the image at *Phaedrus* 246A where the soul is compared συμφύτῳ δυνάμει ὑποπτέρου ζεύγους τε καὶ ἡμιόχου, and where the horses, good and bad, appear to belong to the soul *before* she loses her wings, the essential soul, the true self is identified, in the *Republic* as in the *Phaedo*, with νοῦς or τὸ λογιστικόν, which in the *Timaeus* alone of the three "parts" is immortal. Plato would have been in complete agreement with Aristotle (*EN.* 1178A.5) τὸ γὰρ οἰκεῖον ἐκάστω τῇ φύσει κράτιστον καὶ ἡδιστόν ἐστιν ἐκάστω· καὶ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ δὴ ὁ κατὰ τὸν νοῦν βίος, εἴπερ τοῦτο μάλιστα ἀνθρώπος.

various levels, an affirmation of the self in contra-distinction to, or against what is other than, or alien to the self, so that it may properly be described as a kind of self-respect. Such a capacity for vigorous self-assertion is obviously a necessary ingredient in the make-up of a soldier. But the young guardian is more than a soldier who fights against an enemy. He is also a citizen in a community, and must be capable of identifying himself with his fellow-citizens, of feeling akin and gentle to them.

Why does Plato connect this gentle nature, found in a dog and required in his guardians, so closely with the philosophic? Because, I suggest, the disposition of the young guardian at the level of feeling, and in relation to his fellow-citizens, is an anticipation of the disposition of the philosopher at the level of thought, and in relation to the objects of thought, which are akin, συγγενή, to the reason in his soul. The philosopher is ἐπιθυμήτης σοφίας (475B). No one who holds himself back from learning, who, so to speak, stands out against it, no one who δυσχεράνει περὶ τὰ μαθήματα (*ibid.*), can properly be called φιλόσοφος. As in the *Symposium*, so in the *Republic*, the philosopher, at the fullest development of his nature, and at the highest levels of his experience, is described in terms of ἔρως, when the reason in the soul reaches out to be united with the reason in objective reality.

"So then will not our defense of the philosopher be proper when we say that he who truly loves to learn would naturally strive toward what truly is . . . he does not cease from his love until he lays hold on the nature of each reality itself with that in his soul which is fitted to lay hold on such an object — and that is so fitted which is akin. To this he draws near, and, truly uniting with what truly is, he begets reason and truth (490A)."

Plato is often regarded as an extreme type of dualist, who would sunder both the content of our experience and our experiencing of it into two parts so disparate and dissimilar that all real connection between them is rendered incomprehensible. Passages in the dialogues could certainly be adduced to support such an estimate. But on the other hand there is far more continuity in his view of human nature, and in the development of our experience than is sometimes recognized. Of this the doctrine of ἔρως in the *Symposium* is an obvious example. Another is provided by the identities, related to that doctrine, to which I have here drawn attention. Plato's "little joke" about why a φύλαξ is like a σκύλαξ, so far from being a parody of anyone else's thought, leads us to the heart of his own.