

Chapter V

JUST before Greece was crushed under the heel of the invader, an unofficial committee under the chairmanship of Plato sat to investigate the origin and nature of justice. It was a small committee for such a task, but it contained Socrates. For the first time, so far as records reveal, and really the only time, the subject was opened for discussion in a practical manner. This unique experience has not received the appreciation it deserves. Though many philosophers and theologians have attempted elucidations of the work and the findings of the committee, not one has quite understood its true purpose, or the significance of its report. When Jowett's translation of *The Republic* was published over forty years ago, there was great difference of opinion among philosophers as to whether the search after justice or the building of a state were the chief aim of the work. For example, Morgenstern was one of several not sure whether the search after justice or the building of a state were its real aim. On the other hand, Stallbaum thought the intention was to be found "in the representation of human life in a state perfected by justice and governed according to the idea of good." Jowett, replying to the doubt raised by Morgenstern, says:

The answer is, that the two blend in one and are two faces of the same truth; for justice is the order of the state, and the state is the visible embodiment of justice under the conditions of human society. The one is the soul, and the other is the body, and the Greek idea of the state, as of the individual, is a fair mind in a fair body. In Hegelian phraseology, the state is the reality of which

justice is the idea. Or, described in Christian language, the Kingdom of God is within, and yet develops into a Church, or external kingdom; "the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," is reduced to the proportions of an earthly building. Or, to use a Platonic image, justice and the state are the warp and the woof which run through the whole texture. And when the constitution of the state is completed, the conception of justice is not dismissed, but reappears under the same or different names throughout the work, both as the inner law of the individual soul, and finally as the principle of rewards and punishments in another life.

This reply carries the student far from the Socratic field, and opens up many questions which for the moment were better kept in abeyance. The question put by Morgenstern is concise and admits of no such metaphysical interpretations as Jowett gives it. Really, the trouble lies here: there are two distinct books in *The Republic*, and the task of Socrates, defining justice, is contained in the first section—the first four books, which might have been given the title—"Justice." The second section, Books V–X, deals with the construction of the luxurious state. But the luxurious state is used antithetically, as a terrible example not to be followed, for the state finally constructed in the second section is the very reverse of luxurious; it is communistic, and not strictly that, because the question of the ownership of the land—private or communal—is left open. It is much simpler, for the work of following the arguments, to keep the two parts separate, although the same material and debating points are used in both books. In the analysis which follows, an attempt will be made to show that the conception of justice defined by Socrates was purely individualistic and utterly foreign to any conception of communism. It is one of the greatest curiosities of literature, how philosophers have gone solemnly to work to elucidate *The Republic*, heaping blunder on blunder and never getting within

calling distance of the significance of Socrates' definitions. The most amusing cases are those of Jowett and Lewis Campbell. The latter asks: "What is justice?" and ignores the definition of Socrates. Then he says: "It is a singular fact, and worth the attention of those who look for system in Plato, that the definition of justice here so laboriously wrought out, viz. the right division of labour between the three classes in the state, and between the three corresponding faculties in the individual soul, is nowhere else repeated or applied, although the tripartite division of the soul recurs in the *Timæus*, and the notion of justice is of great importance to the arguments of the *Politicus* and the *Laws*." The tripartite division of labour is nowhere given as a definition of justice. The division arises out of the definition and is consequent to the fundamental laid down by Socrates. But no one was more conscious of failure to apprehend the drift of Socrates than Jowett. Over and over again, in the introduction to *The Republic*, he reveals hesitancy, uncertainty, and an inclination to minimize the idea of any definite aim. He says: "The reader who seeks to find some one idea, under which the whole may be conceived, must necessarily seize on the vaguest and most general." And again, "it is not prose but poetry, at least a great part of it, and ought not to be judged by the rules of logic or the probability of history." Moreover, he regarded the fifth, sixth, and seventh books "as the most important as they are also the most original parts of the work." And, so far did he depart from Socrates' definition, that he substituted a definition riddled by Socrates in the argument, viz. "human perfection, which is justice."

Strangely enough, Walter Pater came nearer than Jowett and Lewis Campbell to understanding Socrates. He writes of the "indefectible definition of justice," and says: "It is thus incidentally and by way of setting forth the definition of justice

or rightness, as if in big letters, that the constitution of the typically right state is introduced into what might actually have figured as a dialogue on the nature of justice." Justice is the true aim of the first section, and not the state, because the discovery of justice is essential for the foundation of the economic state, and its nature and operation will determine the kind of state to be built. This search for the origin and nature of justice in the first four books of *The Republic*, when the Greek states were tottering, is one of the most vital contributions to philosophy bequeathed by ancient civilizations. The very point raised by Jowett in his definition, "human perfection, which is justice," was the one Plato and Socrates found wanting, for there had been men as near perfection as human kind can very well be, who came to aid mankind when its cry for justice shook the heavens, indeed wherever slavery was maintained by the political state. Four hundred years later the perfect man appeared where justice was not to be found, and he was put to death because he preached the coming of the kingdom and its justice. Therefore, the notion of Jowett "that the two (the definition of justice and the construction of the state) blend in one, and are two faces of the same truth," cannot be sustained. Two entirely different aims are pursued in the separate sections; the first four books and the last six. The aim reached in the first is wholly antithetic to the one vainly pursued in the second. The whole of the confusion arises because Jowett and others completely overlook or misunderstand the economic significance of the definition of justice given by Socrates.

The story of *The Republic* opens at the Piræus, on the occasion of the festival of Bendis, the Thracian Artemis. Socrates, with his friend Glaucon, goes to offer up his prayers to the goddess. While enjoying the festal procession, Polemarchus,

the son of an old friend, invites Socrates and Glaucon to his house. There Socrates finds Cephalus (the father of Polemarchus), Thrasymachus, Adeimantus, and Cleitophon. Cephalus, old and rich, is asked by Socrates what he considers to be the greatest blessing he has reaped from his wealth. The reply contained the idea which served Socrates as a basis for opening the discussion of the origin and nature of justice. Cephalus says: "To him who is conscious of no sin, sweet hope, as Pindar charmingly says, is the kind nurse of his age. 'Hope,' he says, 'cherishes the soul of him who lives in justice and holiness, and is the nurse of his age and the companion of his journey:—hope which is mightiest to sway the restless soul of man.'

"How admirable are his words! And the great blessing of riches, I do not say to every man, but to a good man, is that he has had no occasion to deceive or to defraud others, either intentionally or unintentionally, and when he departs to the world below he is not in any apprehension about offerings due to the gods or debts which he owes to men."

Socrates asks: "As concerning justice, what is it?—to speak the truth and to pay your debts—no more than this?"

The debate is opened, but it does not proceed far when Socrates reminds the company that they are seeking for justice, "a thing more precious than many pieces of gold."

The first book closes with a recapitulation of the arguments considered, and Socrates declares: "The result of the whole discussion has been that I know nothing at all. For I know not what justice is, and therefore I am not likely to know whether it is or is not virtue, nor can I say whether the just man is happy or unhappy."

Glaucon takes up the argument at the beginning of the

second book and states the received account of the nature and origin of justice. He says:

They say that to do injustice is, by nature, good; to suffer injustice, evil; but that the evil is greater than the good. And so when men have both done and suffered injustice and have had experience of both, not being able to avoid the one and to obtain the other, they think that they had better agree among themselves to have neither; hence there arise laws and mutual covenants; and that which is ordained by law is termed by them lawful and just. This they affirm to be the origin and nature of justice—it is a mean or compromise between the best of all, which is to do injustice and not to be punished, and the worst of all, which is to suffer injustice without the power of retaliation; and justice, being at a middle point between the two, is tolerated not as a good but as the lesser evil, and honoured by reason of the inability of man to do injustice. For no man who is worthy to be called a man would ever submit to such an agreement if he were able to resist; he would be mad if he did. Such is the received account, Socrates, of the nature and origin of justice.

Socrates pretends to be silenced, but the skirmishing has really produced some result; for the case for the Crown, as it were, has been stated frankly, and now the defence knows the charges to be met. Assuming discouragement, and putting forward a plea of inability to meet the attack of his opponents, he seems about to give up the quest, but they urge him not to let the question drop, to proceed in the investigation. Once again he returns to the debate and reminds them that justice is the subject of the inquiry. It is here that so many commentators of *The Republic* become confused as to the aim of the first four books; for Socrates introduces the analogy of the state with a view to assisting their search of finding justice, only as an aid, not as an objective in itself. He states: "When

the search is complete, there may be a hope that the object of our search will be more easily discovered." The object being justice, not the state. Then he points out the reason why the analogy is useful to their purpose: the state arises out of the needs of mankind. Here the state is a mere idea, as Kant would say. Socrates labours under no delusion, for he knew Athens, and that was state enough for his experience. Indeed, he starts the new approach by saying: "Let us begin and create in idea a state." In idea. The model will be a figment of the imagination, so unlike any concrete example that the very term state may be an absurd misnomer; as good an example of an heuristic fiction as Vaihinger could wish for in expounding the philosophy of "As If." In stating the hypothesis, Socrates begins his idea of the ideal state from fundamentals up.

Then, I said, let us begin and create in idea a state; and yet the true creator is necessity, who is the mother of our invention. Now the first and greatest of necessities is food, which is the condition of life and existence. The second is a dwelling, and the third clothing and the like.

His hearers agree.

The foundation of the state is here economic, not political. The needs of mankind create the state of Socrates.

And now let us see how our city (state) will be able to supply this great demand. We may suppose that one man is a husbandman, another a builder, someone else a weaver—shall we add to them a shoemaker, or perhaps some other purveyors to our daily wants?

They accept the suggestions.

The basis of this state must be common ownership of land. The business of supplying the demands for food, dwellings, and clothing is not handicapped at the outset by landlords,

solicitors, or bailiffs. The husbandman, the builder, the weaver, and the shoemaker are not so far restricted; as producers they have equal opportunity to use the source from which they will produce the supplies. Rent, taxes, tariffs, and charitable contributions have not been invented yet.

It is sometimes urged that there is a grave danger in taking the beginning of the state seriously, for, when Socrates is not carrying his irony too far, he is revealing an unpractical attitude to life. If such notions mean that Socrates was not serious, not in earnest, when he began his state with the need of food, dwelling, and clothing, then in his playful mood he reveals a clearer understanding of economic sequence than many modern economists do when they are serious.

No policeman, no magistrate, no politician, no ruler, no slavery yet; only purveyors to our bodily wants. And supplies can be furnished best by each purveyor sticking to his own job, and doing it at the right time. For example, the husbandman will not make his own plough, the builder will not make his own tools; so carpenters and smiths will be added to the list of purveyors. And the state begins to grow. They will need a marketplace and money tokens for the sale and exchange of their products. This mere idea soon grows at such a pace, that it is "matured and perfected," but resembles no state such as Babylon or Athens, for there is yet no code of Hammurabi, no code of Draco, or any of the arms of the law. Only the economic laws of production, distribution, and exchange have put in appearance. Socrates asks: "Where then is justice, and where is injustice, and in what part of the state did they spring up?" Adeimantus says: "Probably in the dealings of the citizens with one another," but the suggestion is not conclusive. Justice is there, but men of a great civilization, men of a powerful state, men of palatial Athens, do not recognize

her. How could they know that that simple, smooth-moving, comfortable, pleasant-looking lady was justice and not a farmer's wife? Athens carried the old curse with her to the end, and the curse works out in many ways; one is: slowly destroying every memory of the natural beginnings of a community.

Here Socrates might have brought the discussion to an end, for he had discovered justice, but that was not enough for his purpose. He had to satisfy himself that his opponents were themselves just as incapable of recognizing injustice in the complex political state where it is legalized. From this point to the close of the ninth book, Socrates exposes in the finest spirit of high comedy civilized public opinion as represented by his opponents. The conditions of Athens are laid bare, and not until Socrates rubs their noses in the mess do they realize how deep the mire of injustice goes under the fair face of that state.

Evidently justice is not readily discovered in the simple or frugal state, so a luxurious state is thought of; for in such a state, Socrates says, "we shall be more likely to see how justice and injustice originate." He reminds them that in his opinion the true and healthy constitution of the state is the one which he has described, but, if they wish "to see a state at fever-heat," he has no objection to the idea of building a luxurious state. He suspects that many will not be satisfied with the simpler way of life. So numbers of non-essential callings are created, and the *de luxe* state is set going, increasing desires, and, by the growth of population, exceeding its bounds.

Then a slice of our neighbours' land will be coveted by us for pasture and tillage, and they will want a slice of ours, if, like ourselves, they exceed the limit of necessity, and give themselves up to the unlimited accumulation of wealth.

That, Socrates, will be inevitable.

And so we shall go to war, Glaucon, shall we not?

Most certainly, he replied.

Then, without determining as yet whether war does good or harm, this much we may affirm, that now we have discovered war to be derived from causes which are also the causes of almost all the evils in states, private as well as public.

The phrase, wanting "a slice of our neighbours' land," may be translated into the language of the Foreign or Colonial Office as desiring commercial penetration, or trade following the flag, or civilizing the backward native, or developing the natural resources of the ignorant savage. There are many polite ways of expressing Socrates' crude remark. In any case, he clearly saw war as derived from the cause which underlies "almost all the evils in states, private as well as public." Moreover, a slice of a neighbour's land, in the sense of territorial aggression, implies such evils as tribute and slavery; for it is not a mere slice of land that is the military objective; it is the fiscal and labour possibilities which go with captured land.

The argument that follows, describing what is necessary in a luxurious state, once a slice of a neighbour's land is wanted, is Hebraic in tone and reads almost like a broad paraphrase of Deuteronomy. "Cursed be he who removeth his neighbour's landmark." And now armies, policemen, magistrates, politicians, and all the departments for protection and aggression multiply fast. People are drafted from their essential occupations into others, where they are to be drilled and regimented. Parasites increase, and well-fed drones batten on the producers.

The rest of the second book, and most of the third book, are devoted to the task of organizing the luxurious state. Magistrates, armies, poets, physicians, and musicians are to receive an education which will fit them for their duties. The inference

is: all educators in the luxurious state will work overtime. Public opinion, as represented by Glaucon and the others, follows Socrates through the maze of organizing the state as children follow their nurse through the one at Hampton Court. Soldiers and guardians are to be humanized and live in dwellings which will "shield them from the cold of winter and the heat of summer." A really good education will furnish the best safeguard, for "true education, whatever that may be, will have the greatest tendency to civilize and humanize them in their relations to one another and to those who are under their protection." Some of the Platonists, and some of the Neo-Platonists, too, have overlooked the fact that Socrates was not only an ironist, he was a high-minded disciplinarian also. The third book closes with a description of the method of life to be practised by the guardians:

In the first place, none of them should have any property of his own beyond what is absolutely necessary; neither should they have a private house or store closed against anyone who has a mind to enter; their provisions should be only such as are required by trained warriors, who are men of temperance and courage; they should agree to receive from the citizens a fixed rate of pay, enough to meet the expenses of the year and no more; and they will go to mess and live together like soldiers in a camp. Gold and silver we will tell them that they have from God; the diviner metal is within them, and they have therefore no need of the dross which is current among men, and ought not to pollute the divine by such earthly admixture; for that commoner metal has been the source of many unholy deeds, but their own is undefiled. And they alone of all the citizens may not touch or handle silver or gold or be under the same roof with them, or drink from them. And this will be their salvation, and they will be the saviours of the state. But should they ever acquire homes, or lands, or moneys of their own, they will become housekeepers and husbandmen instead of guardians, enemies and tyrants instead of allies of the other citizens; hating

and being hated, plotting and being plotted against, they will pass their whole life in much greater terror of internal than external enemies, and the hour of ruin, both to themselves and the rest of the state, will be at hand. For all which reasons may we not say that thus shall our state be ordered, and that these shall be the regulations appointed by us for our guardians concerning their houses and other matters?

And Glaucon said: "Yes!"

The profound prophecy hidden in the description of a luxurious state was fulfilled about seven years later, for in 404 Lysander destroyed the Piræus and conquered Athens.

The search for justice was postponed until "the state at fever-heat," in process of construction, was completed.

Now the work is ended, Socrates asks:

"But where amid all this, is justice?"

Assuming that their state, if rightly ordered, is perfect, it will be wise, valiant, temperate, and just; they test the validity of these qualities in their state, and having proved to their satisfaction that the first three are without flaw, they find: "the last of the qualities which make a state virtuous must be justice," if they only knew what it was. They had failed to find justice in the simple state, and now, having created a luxurious state to make the search easier, justice is just as hard to find. Public opinion, as represented by Glaucon and the others, is no nearer the quarry. But Socrates is, and he exclaims:

Why, my good sir, at the beginning of your inquiry, ages ago, there was justice tumbling out at our feet, and we never saw her; nothing could be more ridiculous. Like people who go looking about for what they have in their hands—that was the way with us—we looked not at what we were seeking, but at what was far off in the distance; and, therefore, I suppose, we missed her.

What do you mean?

I mean to say that in reality, for a long time past, we have been talking of justice and have failed to recognize her.

I grow impatient at the length of your exordium.

Well then, tell me, I said, whether I am right or not: You remember the original principle which we were always laying down at the foundation of the state, that one man should practise one thing only, the thing to which his nature was best adapted? Now justice is this principle or part of it.

Yes, we often said that one man should do one thing only.

Further, we affirmed that justice was doing one's own business, and not being a busybody; we said so again and again, and many others have said the same to us.

Yes, we said so.

Then to do one's own business in a certain way may be assumed to be justice. Can you tell me whence I derive this inference?

I cannot, but I should like to be told.

Because I think that this is the only virtue which remains in the state when the other virtues of temperance and courage and wisdom are abstracted; and, that, this is the ultimate cause and condition of the existence of all of them, and while remaining in them is their perspective; and we were saying that if the three were discovered by us, justice would be the fourth or remaining one. . . . Are not the rulers in a state those to whom you would entrust the office of determining suits of law?

Certainly.

And are suits decided on any other ground, but that a man may neither take what is another's, nor be deprived of what is his own?

Yes, that is their principle.

Which is a just principle?

Yes.

Then, on this view also, justice will be admitted to be the having and doing what is a man's own, and belongs to him? . . .

The just man, then, if we regard the idea of justice only, will be like the just state? . . .

He will. . . .

Are you satisfied, then, the quality which makes such men and such states is justice, or do you hope to discover some other?

Not I, indeed.

Then our dream has been realized, and the suspicion which we entertained at the beginning of our work of construction, that some divine power must have conducted us to a primary form of justice, has now been verified?

Yes, certainly. . . .

The just man does not permit the several elements within him to interfere with one another, or any of them to do the work of others—he sets in order his own inner life, and is his own master, and his own law, and at peace with himself. . . .

So ages ago, justice was tumbling out at their feet. Glaucon and the others had been looking for something they would not know if they saw it, and it was not necessary to create the luxurious state. What chance of recognizing justice had they in a state at fever-heat, if they could not find her in the simple one? But the creation of the luxurious state gave Socrates the opportunity he desired of taking the lid off Athens and exposing her numberless rascalities. There, injustice in every form was rampant: slavery, meddlesomeness and interference, assertions of unlawful authority, rebellious subjects—“what is all this confusion and delusion but injustice and intemperance and cowardice and ignorance, and every form of vice?” he asks. As from some tower of speculation they look down, and see that virtue is one, but that the forms of vice are innumerable. The beautiful Acropolis rose like a mighty tomb over the artificial, the degraded, and the corrupt life which festered in the city beneath.

“And is not the creation of justice the institution of a natural order and government of one by another in the parts of the soul, and the creation of injustice the production of a state of things at variance with the natural order?” Putting this spiritual seal on the conclusion of the argument, Socrates bequeathes to mankind the jewel of life which Jesus set in a crown to shine there for all time.

The search for justice, then, has resulted in discovering this definition:

Justice is the institution of a natural order in which a man can produce food, buildings, and clothing for himself, removing not a neighbour's landmark, practising one thing only, the thing to which his nature is best adapted, doing his own business, not being a busybody, not taking what is another's, nor being deprived of what is his own, having what is his own, and belongs to him, interfering not with another, so that he may set in order his own inner life, and be his own master, his own law, and at peace with himself.

Glaucon and the others agree with Socrates that some divine power must have conducted them to a primary form of justice.

Now what has all this search for justice, and the revelation of the meaning of justice, to do with the Spartan type of state set up in the fifth to the ninth books? The first four books reveal justice to be a form of pure individualism, for individualism, in the sense of a man being and acting the part of an individual in a free society, must have for an economic fundamental equality of opportunity to produce food, fuel, clothing, and shelter. What has all this to do with wives in common and meals in common? In the eighth book and elsewhere, too, it is laid down "that in the perfect state, wives and children are to be in common, and that all education and the pursuits of war and peace are also to be common . . . that no one was to have any of the ordinary possessions of mankind." Could anything be more absurd than creating a state, for the sole purpose of discovering justice, in which justice would not be required? For communism and socialism deny natural rights, justice; indeed, it is essential, it is the first step taken, to abrogate all notions of right, else how could there

be goods in common? wives in common? or any persons, faculties, or other possessions in common?

Was Socrates tired of the childishness of public opinion as represented by Glaucon, Adeimantus, Polemarchus, Thrasymachus, and the others, and so set a hare coursing to see how far public opinion would chase it? If all the metaphysics in the last six books be set aside for the moment, and only the scheme of communism contained therein be considered, how can it be demonstrated that the individualism of the first four books is in any way connected with the creation of a communist state? It seems to be no accident or defect on Plato's part that contradictions abound in the second section, and that public opinion is just as blind to them as it was to justice. Socrates undoubtedly takes public opinion by the nose and leads it where he wills, into impossible labyrinths of argument about a state that not only is sheer speculation, but that has not the faintest chance of ever being worked in a dream. He asks them not to break and drown him in laughter and dishonour, when they hear his opinion of the impossibility of creating a state without evil. He says:

Until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of the world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who pursue either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never have rest from their evils—no, nor the human race, as I believe—and then only will this our state have a possibility of life and behold the light of day.

Is the creation of the communist state in the second section—the fifth to the ninth books—a delicious joke? Here the philosopher-king is the essential; in the first section, justice is all that is required. The one, for communism, cannot be

found; the other, for individualism, was discovered when a divine power conducted them to it. Surely the purpose of the inquiry into the origin and nature of justice was complete at the end of the fourth book. But Plato was a transcendentalist, and Socrates was a religious economist; therefore, they had to find an enlivening pretext for indulging their desire to present their views; and what better than communism? All men who have little are ready to share with those who have much; the very rich with the richest. And Plato knew few were ready to share his metaphysics without promise of something tangible. Socrates knew that few desire the gifts which stimulate the spirit; because, unfortunately, so many are destitute, and an all-consuming hunger keeps their attention riveted on an empty stomach. With the mass, poverty of body means poverty of soul. And any other state system than that of Athens, some other in which a more equitable method of distribution of wealth would be practised, might afford a field for sowing the seed of truth in men's souls. They knew "a man must take with him into the world below an adamant faith in truth and justice, that there, too, he may be undazzled by the desire of wealth and the other allurements of evil, lest coming upon tyrannies and similar villainies, he do irremediable wrong to others, and suffer yet worse himself." Hence the small commons of the communist state. What did it matter to Plato and Socrates what system was an alternative to that of Athens? They knew the end was near; Athens was doomed. The Peloponnesian War, like all final wars embroiling the states of a particular civilization, was the means unconsciously taken by the people for bringing about that utter disintegration which always heralds the coming of the avenging sword.

In a fragment of one of the poems of Solon, written in his

old age, when he lamented the wisdom of his reforms, he says:

The ambition of the rich knows no bounds; the most wealthy wish to grow yet more so. Who may be able to assuage this insatiable greed! They respect neither sacred property nor public treasure; they plunder all, in defiance of the sacred laws of justice.

The epitaph is supplied by Philemon, who, like Walt Whitman, reflects on the quiet acceptance of cattle.

O blessed thrice and thrice endowed with wealth the beasts who of things hold no discourse, nor any of them resorteth to convincing proof, nor have they any other evil of this kind brought from abroad; but nature such as each brings on, this straightway has for law. But we, mankind, we live a life not worth the living; we are enslaved to opinions, statutes have we found in thralldom to our ancestors and to our offspring.