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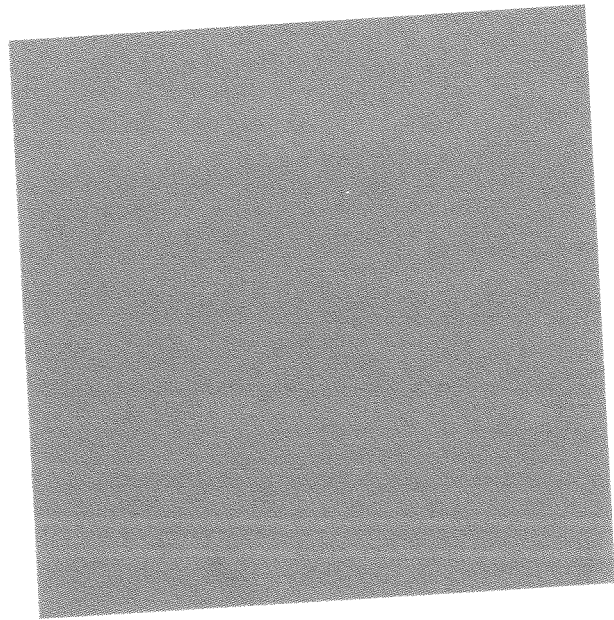
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32. Proclus Diadochus, *In Platonis Timaeum Commentaria I*, edited by E. Diehl (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1965), p. 277. Compare Plutarch, *De animae procreatione in Timaeo* (*Moralia* 6, 1, Hubert), pp. 1212-13. On the theory of genetic or causal definition, see E. Cassirer, *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1932), p. 340, to whose lucid analyses Guthrie (op. cit., p. 144, n. 1) also draws attention.

33. R. Robinson, *Essays in Greek Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 82.

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Popper's Plato An Assessment

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The author examines Karl Popper's contribution to the study of Plato in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Assessment of Popper's claims that Plato is a totalitarian, a historicist, and a racist confirms what has become the general opinion of the work, that it played a major role in changing perceptions of Plato's political theory, in spite of significant problems with many of Popper's claims and the evidence he uses to support them.

With the passing of 50 years, it is possible to provide a dispassionate assessment of Karl Popper's contribution to the study of Plato. On its publication, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*¹ generated enormous controversy and remains controversial to this day. But as passions have cooled, scholars have come to agree that the work made a major contribution, in spite of its substantial flaws. I think this view is basically correct; in this article, I discuss both the work's contribution and its flaws.

In *The Open Society*, Popper approached the study of Plato as an outsider. In his autobiography, he mentions his scanty knowledge of Greek,² while the circumstances that led him to write the work were political rather than scholarly. He describes the work as an attempt to understand totalitarianism and to contribute to "the perennial struggle against it" (*OS*, p. 1). He concedes that *Open Society*, though history, is "somewhat speculative history" (*UQ*, p. 118). It was inspired by political events: "Even when it looks back into the past, its problems are the problems of our own time" (*OS*, p. vii). Popper says that he made his final decision to write the work in March 1938, on the day he learned of the Nazis' invasion of Austria (*OS*, p. viii), and he

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viewed *Open Society*, along with *The Poverty of Historicism*, as his "war effort" (*UQ*, p. 115). These circumstances did not lend themselves to dispassionate inquiry, and the work is anything but dispassionate. To compound matters, the work was written while Popper was a refugee in New Zealand, where circumstances made access to scholarly literature difficult and a heavy teaching load cut into his time (*UQ*, p. 119).

On its publication, *Open Society* was greeted by many classicist scholars with disdain. Though frequently noting the book's intellectual power and valuable insights, initial reviewers tore into it. Major scholars, including R. G. Hackforth, G. C. Field, and J. Tate, criticized the work's denunciatory tone and scholarly lapses.³ Especially shocking to these figures was Popper's zeal, not only in drawing connections between Plato's views and 20th-century totalitarianism but also in crediting Plato with despicable motives. Field compares Popper's attitude to putting Plato on trial for heresy before the inquisition, complaining that Popper interprets everything to show Plato in the worst possible light (Field, p. 274). In his words: Popper "sees Plato all askew because he is always trying to squint around the corner in order to catch a glimpse of the figure of Hitler somewhere in the background" (Field, p. 275). According to Hackforth: "there is much that is unfair because the author is, it would seem, constitutionally incapable of approaching Plato in an impartial, let alone, a sympathetic spirit" (Hackforth, p. 56). Even Richard Robinson, a generally sympathetic reviewer, comments on Popper's "rage to blame": "it is one thing to urge that a thinker's doctrine is deadly, and another thing to pour blame and abuse upon him for having taught it, and impute to him bad motives for teaching it."⁴

Scholarly condemnation was not limited to classicists. Eminent political theorists expressed similar views. For instance, John Plamenatz describes much of the work's content as "careless, confused, badly argued or unjust."⁵ An especially harsh view is expressed by Eric Voegelin, in a private letter to Leo Strauss: "I feel completely justified in saying without reservation that this book is impudent, dilettantish crap. Every single sentence is a scandal."⁶

Yet, in spite of this outpouring, *Open Society* has probably done more to shape contemporary conceptions of Plato's political theory than any other work. The reason for this apparent anomaly is that, as has become clear to all but Popper's most die-hard critics, he was on to something true that needed to be said. As Popper notes, at the time *Open Society* was published, the general image of Plato throughout the philosophical community was of the "divine philosopher."⁷ Though

a series of scholars preceded Popper in calling attention to antiliberal and antidemocratic elements in Plato's political theory,⁸ Popper made this case with unparalleled intellectual and emotional power. After reading the work, one cannot see Plato in the same light again.

In this article, I comment upon three aspects of Popper's analysis of Plato, beginning in Part I with an overall account of his contribution. In Parts II and III, I criticize two specific aspects of Popper's interpretation, the claims that Plato is a "historicist" and that the *Republic* is a racist work. Once again, the overall result of this discussion should be to confirm the general opinion of Popper's treatment of Plato, that it is provocative, original, and important, but also severely flawed.

I

Since the rise of totalitarian regimes earlier this century, many influential scholars have described the central features of totalitarian political theory in similar terms. One particular feature often discussed is its distinctive attitude, combining moral certitude and extreme narrowness of vision. For example, perhaps the central theme of Isaiah Berlin's political writings is the danger posed by thinkers who believe they possess the one solution to all human conflicts:

This is the belief that somewhere, in the past or in the future, in divine revelation or in the mind of an individual thinker, in the pronouncements of history or science, or in the simple heart of an uncorrupted good man, there is a final solution. This ancient faith rests on the conviction that all the positive values in which men have believed must, in the end, be compatible, and perhaps even entail one another.⁹

With discovery of the pattern into which all values fit comes the imperative to bring it about, because only for people who live in accordance with such a pattern is true happiness possible. Berlin draws the crucial political implication of this state of mind—that it can justify the imposition of truth by force:

Any method of bringing this final state nearer would then seem fully justified, no matter how much freedom was sacrificed to forward its advance. It is, I have no doubt, some such dogmatic certainty that has been responsible for the deep, serene, unshakable conviction in the minds of some of the most merciless tyrants and persecutors in history that what they did was fully justified by its purposes.¹⁰

Other thinkers agree. In *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, J. L. Talmon describes the dangers of "a pencil sketch of reality," a broad outline of the ideal social arrangement, absent from which is much of what is recognizable in human society: "The flesh of the intangible, shapeless, living forces, traditions, imponderables, habits, human inertia and lazy conservatism are not there."¹¹ The danger cited by Talmon too is that the would-be reformer, enthralled with his outline, will be willing to impose it by force, while ignoring all that it leaves out.

In the introduction to a collection of writings on Popper's interpretation of Plato, Renford Bambrough defines totalitarianism in similar terms:

Totalitarianism may be defined as the doctrine that there is a unique and accessible source of infallible guidance on the issues of morals and politics; that in any properly formulated dispute about good and evil, right and wrong, one side is right and the other wrong, and that there is a reliable method of determining which is which.¹²

Once again, political implications can be dire. Certainty that one is right justifies placing unlimited authority in the hands of truth's proponents.

As numerous scholars have argued, a similar combination of attitudes is seen in Plato's *Republic*. Berlin cites Plato as a prime example of a believer in the single harmonious solution to human conflict.¹³ It seems clear, as much of the literature critical of Plato has established, that there are important respects in which Plato's political theory is authoritarian. Not least of these is his attempt to anchor the *Republic's* political system in certain knowledge. Government in the ideal state is, of course, in the hands of philosopher-kings, one necessary prerequisite of whose selection is ability to glimpse the Form of the Good. Of course much of Book VII of the *Republic* is given over to discussing the educational process designed to realize this potential.

Not only are the state's rulers to know the highest truths, but they are to govern in accordance with them. Plato describes his ideal rulers as painters, who use the Forms as their divine models in shaping the state:

as they work, they would keep looking back and forth to Justice, Beauty, Moderation, and all such things as by nature exist, and they would compose human life with reference to these, mixing and mingling the human likeness from various pursuits, basing their judgment on what Homer too called the divine and godlike existing in man.¹⁴

The institutional structure of the state affords the guardians power necessary to educate the population properly. They control the edu-

cational system and all means of intellectual production, monopolize military training and weapons, and all political authority. An indication of how far Plato takes this idea is that certain scholars are unwilling to regard the just city as serious and so argue that the *Republic* is a kind of ingenious satire, designed to show the limits of the politically possible. According to this view, Plato relentlessly pushes things to their logical conclusion to reveal the absurdity that results.¹⁵ But evidence for such an interpretation is thin.¹⁶

One of Popper's main contributions to the study of Plato was to call attention to the totalitarian side of Plato's political theory. Publication of *Open Society* indelibly established central aspects of this interpretation, which are conceded by even admirers of Plato in their responses to Popper.¹⁷ Much of the content of *Open Society* is anticipated in the critical examinations of Plato that preceded it. Indeed, antidemocratic and other authoritarian elements in Plato's political theory were well known for many years. As Plamenatz says, almost nothing Popper puts forth about Plato's political theory cannot be found in well-known works of Ernest Barker, which were published early this century.¹⁸ But as presented by Barker and other theorists, these points are not fully developed; their implications remain to be drawn.

Assessment of Popper's contribution is complicated by the fact that he not only lays bare the authoritarian side of Plato's political theory but also interprets this in a particular, original way. The central argument in *Open Society*, directed at other thinkers as well as Plato, centers on a connection between historicism and totalitarianism. We will return to historicism in Part II. For now, we can say that, by this term, Popper means belief in ineluctable historical laws, in accordance with which societies must be organized. In Popper's words, the historicist believes that "history is controlled by specific historical or evolutionary laws whose discovery would enable us to prophesy the destiny of man" (*OS*, p. 2). In the case of Plato, these are laws of inevitable decline, and so the political imperative is to arrest change. The ideal state, modeled on the Forms, is intended by its founders to be a static polity, resistant to all change, and so to all decline. To allow the rulers to succeed in arresting change, all power is concentrated in their hands. The result is a program that is "fundamentally identical" with totalitarianism (*OS*, p. 87). Important aspects of the program are division of the classes, with the ruling class strictly separated from the lower class, to which Popper refers repeatedly as "human cattle." The ruling class has a monopoly over military matters and the power to

ensor all aspects of intellectual life. They are to prevent all innovation in legislation, education, and religion (OS, pp. 86-87). To the interests of the static state, all other considerations are subordinated: "The criterion of morality is the interest of the state," with the arrangement as a whole beyond the inhabitants' power to question or judge (OS, p. 107; his emphasis). Popper describes this outlook as "totalitarian ethics" (OS, p. 107). The ideal state, resistant to change, in which each person has his place and his role, is a closed, magical, organic society (OS, p. 173).

This sketch should indicate the thrust of Popper's reading of Plato. But it is far milder than what Popper presents, as it omits the inflammatory charge that Plato is a racist (to which we will return in Part III) and insistent speculation about Plato's motives. Two examples of the latter are that Plato dishonestly skews his discussion of justice in the *Republic* to deceive his readers, "to make propaganda for his totalitarian state" (OS, p. 92), and that the *Republic* is somehow Plato's own bid for political power, to have himself crowned philosopher-king (OS, p. 153). Fortunately, Popper's wilder charges can be separated from his central contentions about Plato's political theory, without great detriment to the latter. This is also true of Plato's alleged historicism. Though Popper writes that Plato's "totalitarian programme" is "certainly founded upon a historicist sociology" (OS, p. 87), this claim is almost certainly false. As we will see in the next section, Popper's arguments for Plato's historicism rest on a combination of forced evidence and confusion. However, although it is not correct to say that Plato is a totalitarian *because he is a historicist*, the evidence that Popper advances makes it hard to deny that he is a totalitarian in some sense, even though he is not a historicist.

Critics before Popper had detailed unsavory aspects of Plato's political theory, including several who had called attention to resemblances between Plato's city and truly monstrous 20th-century regimes. But it was left to Popper to make the case in full. In *Man and Society*, Plamenatz discusses Montesquieu's originality in regard to the idea of constitutional checks and balances:

This idea was by Montesquieu expounded with greater insight and elaboration than by anyone before him; he possessed it more fully than they did, saw further into its implications and into the conditions, social and psychological, of its being realized. It is his idea by right of conquest.¹⁹

According to a similar standard, the thesis that Plato is a totalitarian belongs to Popper. He expounded the idea with greater insight and

elaboration than his forebears and saw further into its implications. Once again, the lamentable excesses and eccentricities of his presentation cannot detract from the core of truth in his assessment of the "divine philosopher."

II

Though much of what Popper says about the nature of Plato's political theory is doubtless correct, his distinctive claims concerning Plato's historicism should be rejected. Even here, however, we will see that Popper sheds interesting light on Plato. The core of Popper's argument is that Plato believed in rationally ascertainable laws of historical decline, which profoundly influenced his political theory. Plato sought to counteract the workings of these laws by constructing a stable state. As we have seen, central features of the state stem from the need to arrest all change.

Popper notes that previous scholars had paid little attention to historicism (OS, p. 35). They have not been persuaded by Popper's arguments. Field calls the claim that Plato is an historicist "wholly false" (Field, p. 274), while according to Robinson, "Plato did not believe historicism at all" (Robinson, p. 95). Questions of evidence here are complex and cannot be examined fully in this article. Complete examination of the evidence bearing on this subject—and on others of Popper's claims (and those of other scholars critical of Plato)—are presented by Levinson, in *In Defense of Plato*,²⁰ though this takes 674 pages—large pages with small print. Thus discussion in this section is somewhat cursory. To examine an aspect of Popper's argument more thoroughly, I will discuss a more specific claim, that the just city is racist, in the following section.

Roughly and briefly, some evidence that Plato is a historicist is found in different dialogues. In particular, in Book VII of the *Republic*, Socrates describes the decline of the just city as due to a law of inevitable decline, which is referred to as the "Platonic number" (*Republic* 546a-d), and in both the *Statesman* (269c-74e) and *Laus* (713a-14a), Plato presents myths about how human society has fallen off from a prior and perfect Golden Age. Because Plato has literary as well as philosophical concerns in the dialogues and often presents his ideas in the form of myths, difficulties of interpretation can be severe. For this reason, it is not possible to prove conclusively that Popper's interpretations of particular passages are incorrect—though they remain

at best highly improbable. But even if Popper's interpretations of specific passages are not impossible, his overall claims of historicism are severely undermined by other evidence. It is the commentator's obligation to present the best possible interpretation of all the evidence, and this Popper has not done.

Powerful evidence against his view is found in Book III of the *Laws*, in which Plato traces the development of civilization from a primordial disaster (*Laws* 676b ff.). According to Popper's account, historical development is ineluctable decline from a perfect Golden Age, to which Plato wishes to return, and with which Plato identifies the ideal city. Plato wishes to move "back to the primitive state of our forefathers, the primitive state founded in accordance with human nature, and therefore stable; back to the tribal patriarch of the time before the Fall, to the natural class rule of the wise few over the ignorant many" (*OS*, p. 86). Though there are aspects of decline in Plato's tale in the *Laws*, Popper does not consider aspects of historical development, especially improvement of the Dorian monarchy over time (*Laws* 691b-92c).²¹ The fact that this state progressed is strong evidence that history is not unidirectional and that Plato did not view the ideal city as the starting point of a downward movement through history.

Additional evidence bears on an extreme and unusual aspect of Popper's interpretation. Popper's claim that Plato's political thought is dominated by laws of historical decline runs up against Plato's metaphysical views, which of course center upon the theory of Forms. Apparently in order to reconcile Plato's purported historical laws and the theory of Forms, Popper contends that the latter play a role in historical development. It is central to Plato's view that Forms are *prior* to material objects in a metaphysical sense; only they are truly real and material things derive whatever being they have from them. To metaphysical priority, Popper adds temporal priority. He argues that the Forms are historical points of origin for material objects and so original causes of the latter's existence and decline through time. Accordingly, Forms are "something like primogenitors or starting points of all changes in the world of flux" (*OS*, pp. 35-36). This claim fits in well with Popper's historical view, because it reinforces the belief that historical development is descent from a perfect, original condition.

The problem, however, is that this interpretation of the Forms is plainly false. Plato never conceived of Forms as causes of historical development. As Levinson points out, Popper's interpretation is in part based on gross misreading of the *Timaeus*. In the creation myth

in this work, Plato describes the Forms as existing prior to temporal objects, which are created in their image by a cosmic artificer, or *demiourgos*. *Demiourgos* is the Greek word for "craftsman," and so Plato's model of creation in the *Timaeus* has the primordial "craftsman" creating the material work after the model of the Forms (*Timaeus* 29a ff.), as a carpenter shapes his wood after the models that he uses. Popper misread Plato's account. In the first edition of *Open Society*, he depicted the Forms as the efficient causes of material objects' coming into being—and so of historical change: "sensible things are created by the Forms which stamp or impress themselves upon pure space, and thereby give the offspring their shape" (*OS*, p. 26).

The Form or Idea of a sensible thing is, as we have seen, not in that thing, but separated from it; it is its forefather, its primogenitor; but this form or father passes something on to the sensible things which are its offspring or race, namely, their nature. (*OS*, p. 74)

This interpretation omits the role of the *demiourgos*. In the second edition of the work, Popper corrects this blunder, which he admits, in the notes.²² Remarkably, however, Popper does not alter his account of historical development from the Forms in the text of his discussion, to take account of this change.²³

There is no doubt that Popper's account of Plato's historicism is incorrect. It is an obvious case of tailoring evidence to fit a preconceived interpretation, which is forced upon recalcitrant texts. Nor is this surprising in view of Popper's purpose in writing the book. Details of particular passages aside, it is clear that Popper is mistaken about fundamental themes in Plato's political theory. Roughly and briefly, Plato's just city is dedicated to the propagation of virtue, which he views as central to human happiness. Because of his belief in the intractability of irrational and destructive elements in the human soul, Plato believes that complete control of the social environment and mobilization of all the state's resources are necessary to make people as virtuous as possible. To be able to promote virtue for as long as possible, Plato designs central political institutions to combat instability, though, because of his Heraclitean belief in the mutability of the material world, he believes decline is still inevitable. Again briefly, Popper focuses on the inevitability of change and decline. Though Plato's totalitarian tendencies are readily explained according to the pattern identified by Berlin and Talmon, it seems not to have occurred to Popper that a thinker can be a totalitarian because of reasons other than historicism. To prove his thesis, Popper reads texts selectively, often focussing on isolated pieces of doctrine, wrested from their

contexts, with their meanings distorted. On the whole, I believe, we perceive similar patterns in regard to distinctive elements of Popper's interpretation elsewhere in *Open Society*, though not all cases can be discussed in this article.

But in spite of its many flaws, Popper's examination of Plato's historical views has been of great importance. Though Plato is not preoccupied with laws of historical decline, he is interested in arresting change. Once an ideal political arrangement is erected, change means decline. Though Plato speaks of the city improving over time, through the workings of the education system (*Republic* 425a), on the whole, he intends to freeze conditions, without hope of progress in the usual sense. This concern is reflected in the *Laws*. The ideal state in that work is to be literally frozen in time, with every detail of the elaborate system of legislation put in place to resist change. The Athenian Stranger, Plato's chief spokesman in the *Laws*, expresses his admiration of the Egyptian state, which, he declares, had not changed in 10,000 years.²⁴ Accordingly, though in discussing Plato's historicism the overall thrust of Popper's claims is incorrect, *Open Society* makes a significant contribution in raising questions concerning Plato's view of the state's place in history, and so concentrates the reader's attention on this important subject.

III

A clear case of Popper forcing his evidence is his contention that the *Republic* is a racist work. The evidence in regard to this claim is more contained, and so less ambiguous, than in regard to Plato's alleged historicism, and so one can see exactly where Popper goes wrong—and resisted pointed criticisms of his work. I should note here at the outset that to some extent, any criticism of Plato for being a racist is bound to be correct because of well-known features of the just city (discussed below). Plato believed that preserving the "purity" (*katharon*, *Republic* 460c) of the guardians is necessary for maintenance of the just city. Thus I will concentrate here on what is distinctive about Popper's arguments and the evidence he uses to support them.

Popper's account of Plato's racism is obviously intended to draw parallels between Plato's political theory and Nazism. He injects a strong element of biology into his account of Plato's historicism: "the biological element in Plato's naturalism turns out, in the end, to have the most important part in the foundation of his historicism" (*OS*,

p. 81). The laws of historical decline turn out to have racial content. And so Popper argues that, as part of the process of arresting change, the rulers of the ideal state must halt racial decline. They must combat "the evil rampant in the members of the race of men, i.e., *racial degeneration*" (*OS*, p. 151).

To achieve this end, the rulers must impose racial hegemony on the state. The secrets of racial purity are contained in the Platonic number; not understanding this ushers in racial degeneration and the state's fall (*OS*, p. 83). Rule of philosopher-kings, therefore, is justified because only they understand "the secrets of mathematical eugenics, of the Platonic Number" (*OS*, p. 151). This is necessary for "breeding the master race" (*OS*, p. 148), and the philosopher-king emerges as a "philosophic breeder" (pp. 148-49).

What Plato has in mind in the *Republic*, then, is "the totalitarian class rule of the master race" (*OS*, p. 119). Popper's Nazification of Plato extends to other areas of the *Republic*. For instance, the "myth of the metals" in Book III (on which, more below) is unmasked as more "racialism, [Plato's] Myth of Blood and Soil" (*OS*, p. 139).

To assess Popper's account of Plato's racism, it is advisable to pause in order to be clear about exactly what *racism* is. Though the term can be used in different ways,²⁵ the sense that concerns us centers on morally objectionable distribution of things that are of value: money, honor, social position, and so forth. Racism in this sense involves allocating such things on the basis of racial criteria rather than (what we can call) *appropriate criteria*. Complex questions concerning the nature of appropriate criteria must be put aside here. As the appellation indicates, appropriate criteria are those upon the basis of which different goods *should* be distributed. In certain cases, these criteria are readily identifiable. For example, if a number of musicians audition for spots in an orchestra, positions should go to those who most clearly demonstrate the qualities one looks for in a good musician. Or in the case of a football league, the limited number of available positions should go to individuals who best demonstrate the relevant skills. Though there can be problems in identifying the best musicians or football players, the criteria in these fields and others like them are relatively clear. In practice, the most serious difficulties will probably occur when different individuals have roughly similar abilities or are better in certain aspects of their fields than in others. But difficulties of this sort concern the application of criteria rather than criteria themselves.

In other cases appropriate criteria are less easily identified, becoming themselves objects of controversy. For instance, it is generally agreed that intellectual aptitude should be a primary consideration in university admissions decisions. But there is considerable disagreement about how aptitude is identified or measured. Fortunately, in this article we need not become embroiled in such questions. In the case that interests us, the appropriate criteria are clear-cut.

The identification of appropriate criteria in some distributive situation allows us to see how they are supplanted in cases of racism. This would occur if musicians of particular racial groups were forbidden to play in various musical organizations—that is, if positions were distributed according to race rather than musical ability. In the football example, the supplanting of appropriate criteria would occur if opportunities went to members of specific racial groups rather than to the best players. The racism of Nazi Germany was seen in countless cases along these lines. During the early years of the Reich, Jews were barred from profession after profession—as a prelude to their later physical liquidation. For example, in Frankfurt, in April 1933, German Jewish teachers were forbidden to teach in universities; German Jewish actors were barred from the stage; German Jewish musicians were forbidden to play in orchestras.²⁶ In regard to the distribution of more general social goods, such as the rights of citizenship or protection under the rule of law, noncontroversially appropriate criteria are less easily identified. But it is a well-established belief in modern democratic societies that these goods should be distributed to all alike because of their fundamental human equality, or human rights. Thus we look with horror at the Nazi view that differences in rights and obligations should derive from racial differences.²⁷

The charge that Plato is a racist centers upon the distinctive institutions of the just city. The major institutions concern the system of classes and the communal family arrangements under which the guardians live. As readers of the *Republic* of course know, the ideal city is constructed upon a three-class system. Plato believes that there are three different kinds of people, whose souls are “ruled” by different passions, by the love of wisdom, honor, and money, respectively. The passion that rules a given soul determines the individual’s value orientation and beliefs. Thus individuals ruled by reason prefer the pursuit of knowledge and truth to other values and believe that the pleasures associated with these activities are best. Something similar is seen in the other types of men.²⁸ Plato’s political theory in the

Republic is constructed upon the idea that the three types of individuals should be placed in different classes and perform the different functions for which they are naturally suited. Plato argues for this principle, to which we can refer as the *principle of specialization*, in Book II (*Republic* 369e-70c). Though this injunction is commonly taken to apply to individuals, there can be no doubt that Plato means for it to apply rather to classes (*Republic* 434a-b). Thus lovers of wisdom are to rule; lovers of honor, to provide military service in the role of auxiliaries; and lovers of money, to perform economic functions as Farmers or Craftsmen, growing the city’s food and making whatever it requires in the way of arts and crafts.

The upshot of Plato’s belief in three distinct human types with different moral and intellectual potential is expressed in the “myth of the metals,” presented in Book III. According to the myth, all in the city are brothers, but the god who created them mixed gold in the souls of some, those most capable of ruling, silver in the souls of the auxiliaries, and bronze in the members of the third class. For the most part, members of each class will produce children like themselves. But there will be exceptions. This part of the myth should be quoted:

You will for the most part produce children like yourselves but, as you are all related, a silver child will occasionally be born from a golden parent, and vice versa, and all the others from each other. So the first and most important command of the god to the rulers is that there is nothing they must guard better or watch more carefully than the mixture in the souls of the next generation. If their own offspring should be found to have iron or bronze in his nature, they must not pity him in any way, but give him the esteem appropriate to his nature; they must drive him out to join the worker and farmers. Then again, if an offspring of these is found to have gold or silver in his nature they will honor him and bring him up to join the rulers or guardians, for there is an oracle that the city will be ruined if ever it has an iron or bronze guardian. (*Republic* 415a-c)

The thrust of Plato’s assessment of these class differences receives clear political expression in the view that members of the lowest class should be “enslaved (*doulon . . . einai*)” to the highest. Because they do not have the capacity to control the appetitive aspects of their souls, they should be enslaved to the rulers who will carefully train them from earliest childhood in order to allow them to achieve a condition of mastery of their appetites analogous to that of the rulers (*Republic* 590c-d). In a society that practiced human slavery and placed great weight on the distinction between free and slaves, this is a powerful statement.

Plato believes that the distinction between natural human types is essential to the just city. His emphasis upon justice, that members of each class stay in their places and do their own jobs, follows from his belief that only individuals with souls of gold are qualified to rule. Because of their superior natures, the rulers can be trusted with unchecked political power. The details of Plato's argument need not be discussed here.²⁹ Let it suffice to say that Plato believes in an inverse proportion: only if a city is blessed with rulers who have no interest in ruling, who do not believe they can derive personal benefits from ruling, can it have a good government. The more eagerly individuals pursue political office—because they view ruling as a path to individual gain—the less will they be inclined to rule justly, putting their cities' interest before their own (*Republic* 520c-21a). Because of their love of knowledge and truth—which Plato believes will be associated with disdain for the values of the phenomenal world—philosophic rulers can be trusted to rule justly. So Plato places no institutional or other checks upon their power. He advocates instead a careful process of lifelong screening and testing, to make sure the rulers have the necessary moral and intellectual qualities. The importance of insuring that the right people—and only the right people—rule is the major reason for the rigid class system. As Plato says in the myth of the metals: “the first and most important (*kai proton kai malista*) command of the god to the rulers is that there is nothing they must guard better or watch over more carefully than the mixture in the souls of the next generation.” As we have seen, “the city will be ruined if ever it has an iron or bronze guardian” (*Republic* 415c).

The possibility of racism arises in connection with Plato's belief that an individual's moral and intellectual potential (with these two aspects of the psyche closely connected) is determined largely by birth. In most cases the child's attributes will strongly reflect the qualities of his or her parents, and so there is a strong presumption that the child of parents of a certain class will also end up in that class, though there will be exceptions to this rule.

Because of his belief in the powers of heredity, Plato advocates eugenics. In raising various kinds of animals, breeders are careful to use the best stock, in the prime of life. Because similar reasoning applies to human beings, steps must be taken to insure that the best men breed with the best women, and the less worthy are restrained from reproducing. The traditional family structure, then, must be replaced for the guardians by community of the family.

The details of the system Plato devises are familiar. Sexual activity and reproduction are state controlled. Temporary marriages for the sake of reproduction are arranged and consecrated at public marriage festivals. The rulers are to devise a cleverly rigged lottery system, to lead all guardians to believe that their marriage prospects are determined by chance, though the rulers actually arrange things in accordance with their eugenic priorities. Plato also says that guardians who perform especially meritorious service should be given extra mating privileges, to ensure more offspring from the best stock and as a further inducement to valor (*Republic* 460b). Children are raised in public nurseries, with steps taken to hide the identities of parents and children. People are allowed to reproduce only during their prime: women between the ages of 20 and 40; men between 30 and 55. It appears that individuals are to have no sexual outlets until they reach the prescribed ages, though once they are past childbearing age, they are allowed to copulate freely, within the constraints of the incest taboos. Children that result from such unions are not permitted to live (*Republic* 460e-61c).

This sketch of Plato's system should suffice for our purposes.³⁰ We can see immediately that there is evidence that Plato is a racist in some sense, as he believes in the inherent superiority of certain human types and that the characteristics that constitute superiority are biological, passed on through heredity. To this extent, then, Popper's analysis is largely correct, and he performs a valuable service in calling attention to this side of Plato's work. However, there is clear evidence that Plato is not a racist in the sense we have discussed and that he is not interested in racial purity, as Popper contends. The decisive point is in the myth of the metals, the requirement that the rulers make class assignments on the basis of appropriate criteria (or what Plato regards as such), rather than birth. Though the qualities that render individuals suitable for particular classes are generally inherited from one's parents, exceptions do arise. Plato is unequivocal in that, in such cases, relevant qualities take precedence over birth. This is not an isolated detail of Plato's account. It is, as we have seen, the rulers' “first and most important” duty. For ease of reference, we can refer to this injunction as the *placement rule*.

Given the placement rule, Popper's claim that Plato is interested in racial purity stands refuted, unless he can somehow explain this away. Popper deals with the rule in the following passage:

[I]t must be admitted that [Plato] here announces the following rule: “if in one of the lower classes children are born with an admixture of gold

and silver, they shall . . . be appointed guardians, and . . . auxiliaries." But this concession is rescinded in a later passage of the *Republic*. (OS, p. 141; ellipses are Popper's)

The reader will note that Popper does not mention that this "concession" is the rulers' first and most important duty. He also neglects to mention that the rule is repeated in Book IV: "if an offspring of the guardians is inferior, he must be sent off to join the other citizens, and if the others have an able offspring, he must be taken into the guardian group" (*Republic* 423c-d).

Popper's position on the placement rule centers on the claims (a) that it is not put forth sincerely and (b) that it means only that "nobly born but degenerate children may be pushed down, but not that any of the baseborn may be lifted up" (OS, p. 141). Because (b) stands in clear defiance of Plato's text, Popper's only ground for holding it is (a). But it is not true that Plato later "rescinds" the placement rule. Popper cites two passages from the *Republic* in which he believes the rescission takes place: *Republic* 546a ff. and 434c (OS, p. 272, n. 12). The passages are straightforward; neither supports his interpretation, so it is not clear on what his readings are based. The former passage, in which the Platonic number is introduced, concerns the importance of maintaining the placement rule, though only in regard to making sure that rulers have the proper qualities. *Republic* 434c reaffirms the need to keep people in their proper classes, and so, again, by implication, the placement rule. Popper also appeals to *Laws* 930d-e, which, he says, "contains the principle that the child of a mixed marriage inherits the caste of his lesser parent" (OS, p. 272, n. 12). However, this passage says nothing about "castes" but concerns children who result from unions of slaves and nonslaves. In addition, this passage not only does not address the placement rule but also concerns a different ideal city in a different work.

Criticisms of Popper along these lines are made repeatedly in the literature. Both Hackforth and Robinson note that the placement rule is not rescinded in the *Republic* passages.³¹ Levinson, not surprisingly, criticizes Popper at length.³² Popper did not avail himself of his many opportunities to respond, while subsequent editions of *Open Society* retain the objectionable argument.

In 1961, Popper added a reply to Levinson to *Open Society* (pp. 323-43), in which he tried to correct what he viewed as a mistaken impression of himself put forward by Levinson, and then responded to a few specific criticisms, which concern what he calls "cardinal points" (OS, p. 330). The fourth of these takes up the question of

racism (OS, pp. 336ff.). Popper's discussion of the problem with the myth of the metals is as follows:

As to the problem whether Plato allowed—very exceptionally—a mingling of his races (which would be the consequence of promoting a member of the lower race), opinions may differ. I still believe that what I said is true. But I cannot see that it would make any difference if exceptions were permitted. (Even those modern totalitarians to whom Professor Levinson alludes permitted exceptions.) (OS, p. 338)

Popper here fails to take up the crucial question whether the placement rule is rescinded—though he appears to countenance the possibility that it is not (but does not correct his book's account or pursue the implications in regard to his view of Plato's racism). It should also be noted that his brief discussion here misses the point. The existence of even a few exceptions proves that his account of Plato's concern with racial purity is incorrect.

Examination of Popper's account of Plato's racism shows the problems with his scholarship. Because his handling of the evidence in this case is indicative of his scholarship throughout his treatment of Plato, it is not surprising that scholars reacted as they did. However, though little can be learned from the distinctive features of Popper's account of Plato's racism, other aspects of his discussion are, as we have seen, instructive. Once again, one sees reasons for the general opinion of Popper's account of Plato—illuminating in important respects, in spite of severe deficiencies.

NOTES

1. K. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. 1, *The Spell of Plato*, 5th ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966); cited hereafter in the text as OS.
2. K. Popper, *Unended Quest: An Intellectual Autobiography* (London: Fontana, 1976), p. 119; cited hereafter in the text as UQ.
3. Reviews of *Open Society*, by R. G. Hackforth, in *Classical Review* 61 (1947): 55-57; by G. C. Field, in *Philosophy* 21 (1946): 271-76; and by J. Tate, in *Classical Review*, n.s., 8 (1958): 241-42; these works cited hereafter in the text by authors' names.
4. R. Robinson, "Dr. Popper's Defence of Democracy," in *Essays in Greek Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), pp. 88, 91; cited hereafter in the text by author's name.
5. J. Plamenatz, "The Open Society and Its Enemies (Review Article)," rpt. in *Plato, Popper and Politics*, edited by R. Bambrough (Cambridge: Heffer, 1967), p. 145.
6. E. Voegelin to L. Strauss, 18 April 1950, *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934-1964*, edited and translated by P. Emberly and B. Cooper (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), p. 67.

7. OS, p. viii; for the standard view, see R. Levinson, *In Defense of Plato* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), p. 3; the quoted phrase is from Ralph Waldo Emerson.
8. Popper's main predecessors were R.H.S. Crossman, *Plato Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939); W. Fite, *The Platonic Legend* (New York: Scribner, 1934); and G. Winspear, *The Genesis of Plato's Thought* (New York: Dryden, 1940); their views are briefly discussed in Levinson, *Defense*, chap. 1.
9. I. Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 167. This is not a full definition of totalitarianism; for a more encompassing definition, see C. Friedrich and Z. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Praeger, 1966). Throughout this article, I will use the word *authoritarian*, along with *totalitarian*, to signify a doctrine with the characteristics that Berlin and the other thinkers discussed below identify.
10. Berlin, *Four Essays*, p. 168.
11. J. L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (New York: Norton, 1970), p. 135.
12. Bambrough, "Introduction," *Plato, Popper, and Politics*, p. 17.
13. I. Berlin, *Against the Current* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1979), pp. 68, 80, etc.
14. Plato, *Republic* 501b; translation by G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1974), occasionally modified slightly. Plato is quoted from the edition of J. Burnet, *Platonis Opera*, 5 vols. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1900-07).
15. L. Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 124-27, 138; A. Bloom, *The Republic of Plato* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), pp. 407-12.
16. See G. Klosko, "The 'Straussian' Interpretation of Plato's *Republic*," *History of Political Thought* 7 (1986): 275-93.
17. See, e.g., Hackforth, p. 57; Robinson, pp. 79, 81, 86.
18. Plamenatz, "The Open Society and Its Enemies (Review Article)," p. 265.
19. J. Plamenatz, *Man and Society*, 2 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), vol. 1, p. 294.
20. Levinson, *Defense*, esp. Appendix 14, pp. 622-29.
21. As Levinson points out (*Defense*, p. 626).
22. The mistake is acknowledged in n. 15 to chap. 3, p. 211 (*The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 2nd ed. [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950], p. 479; this edition is in one volume).
23. Levinson, *Defense*, pp. 628-29.
24. Plato, *Laws* 656d-57a. This interpretation leaves out the role of the Nocturnal Council, discussed in Book XII of the *Laws*, which could be a source of gradual, piecemeal social engineering. For a critique of Popper along these lines, see M. Browsers, "Piecemeal Reform in Plato's *Laws*," *Political Studies* 43 (1995): 312-24.
25. These senses are discussed in regard to Plato's *Republic* in G. Klosko, " 'Racism' in Plato's *Republic*," *History of Political Thought* 12 (1991): 1-13, from which much of the following discussion is taken.
26. M. Gilbert *The Holocaust* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1985), p. 36.
27. L. Dawidowicz, *The War against the Jews*, new ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968), p. 67.
28. Plato, *Republic* 580d-81d; for how different elements "rule" in different souls, see G. Klosko, "The 'Rule' of Reason in Plato's Psychology," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 5 (1988): 341-56.
29. See G. Klosko, *The Development of Plato's Political Theory* (New York: Methuen, 1986), pp. 138-41.
30. Other relevant details are discussed in Klosko, " 'Racism' in Plato's *Republic*."
31. Hackforth, p. 57; Robinson, p. 76.
32. Levinson, *Defense*, pp. 536-40, 424-31.

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