

THE DRAMA OF THE HUMAN CONDITION.
NOTES ON THE CAUSES AND ORIGINS OF EVIL
IN PLATO'S *REPUBLIC**

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Abstract. In my analysis I deal with some causes and origins of evil and of moral degeneration in the human dimension. My analysis focuses on Plato's *Republic*. The origins and causes of the presence of injustice and of vice lie in the very structure of the human soul. The division of the soul into parts which are at least reciprocally independent of each other implies that there is the possibility that they are in conflict with each other. This is the origin of injustice and the root of every form of evil. The correct equilibrium among the parts of the soul, which, in my opinion, are to be interpreted as authentic potencies, can be achieved only by developing the rational part. This development requires a thorough education in philosophy. Throughout my analysis I quote passages in which Plato points out the presence of bad instincts and, in general, of a morally difficult component in our soul. The kind of soul considered in my analysis is the embodied soul.

Keywords: Evil, Plato, Republic, Soul, Education.

INTRODUCTION

In my analysis, I would like to discuss Plato's interpretation of the origins and the causes of Evil¹ in the human dimension. I shall mainly base my analysis on

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¹ In this analysis, I shall refer to Good and Evil in the human dimension, i.e. as results of human actions. I shall not refer to the cosmological Good and Evil; nor shall I refer to the Idea of Good described in *Republic VI*.

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some passages of Plato's *Republic*². The thesis of my analysis is that the root of the existence of Evil in the human dimension lies in the structure of the human soul as such³. Human beings are exposed to the risk of moral degeneration because of the very nature of their own soul. The soul is composed of different parts: the mutual relations of the three parts cause the emergence of justice or injustice. The origin of Evil is within us; we are the cause of any moral degradation in the human dimension, no matter whether we speak of individuals, of societies, or of human history in general. Hence, we do not need to look far beyond ourselves in order to find the cause of any bad deed.

We can see, through Plato's observations on the structure of the soul, that the soul is composed of three potencies (the rational part – λογιστικόν –, the spirited part – θυμοειδής –, and the appetitive part – ἐπιθυμητικόν –⁴). Every individual is, as such, a plurality of at least partially independent entities. The soul's composition of different parts guides us to the moral question of justice and injustice. The main problem concerning our soul is that we ought to seek a morally correct equilibrium among the parts of our soul. This equilibrium is not given, it must be reached.

The relations among these three parts can be characterised by harmony. If the rational part exercises the leading authority, this state is the condition of justice⁵.

² Despite the fact that most studies on the problem of Evil in Plato are dedicated, for instance, to the *Politicus* or to the *Laws*, I am of the opinion that the *Republic*, too, offers many starting points to analyse the problem of Evil in the human dimension.

³ As regards the structure of the human soul, I shall adopt the interpretation which maintains the presence of an effective tripartition of the individual soul – at least in the embodied condition – in Plato's *Republic* (in order to have examples of the tripartition of the soul, see *Republic* IV, 435e1-444b8, *Republic* IX, 580d3-581a1, and *Republic* IX, 588b10-589b7). Every individual soul, when the soul is embodied – that is, in its earthen life – is composed of three mutually independent components, the rational part, the spirited part, and the appetitive part. Although the three parts have contact with each other, they maintain, nonetheless, a certain degree of mutual independence. These parts are, in my opinion, to be interpreted as potencies, since they are the principle of the individual actions. In my analysis, I shall not deal with the question of the presence of differences (or of the absence thereof) between Plato's interpretation of the soul in *Republic* Books IV and IX, on the one hand, and *Republic* X, on the other hand, since my analysis focuses on some aspects of the soul's embodied condition. For an investigation into the difference between embodied soul and not embodied soul, I refer, for instance, to the book of Hendrik Lorenz, *The Brute Within. Appetitive Desire in Plato and Aristotle*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2006, in particular *Part One: Appetite and Reason in Plato's Republic*, pp. 7-52), and to the book by Thomas More Robinson, *Plato's Psychology* (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1995 (1970), in particular pp. 34-58).

⁴ As regards the translation of “ἐπιθυμητικόν”, I shall adopt the translation “appetitive” instead of “desiderative”, since desires are not limited to this part (see *Republic* IX, 580d3-581a1). Translating “ἐπιθυμητικόν” with “desiderative” might give the impression that desires are limited to this part of the soul.

⁵ Eric Brown speaks in his study *The Unity of the Soul in Plato's Republic*, in *Plato and the Divided Self*, edited by Rachel Barney, Tad Brennan, and Charles Brittain (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2012, pp. 53-74) of the hydraulic principle of psychology in Plato. The strengthening of the desires of a part of the soul implies the weakening of the desires of the other parts of the soul; the desires of the rational part must become stronger so that the desires of the appetitive part could become weaker (see especially p. 70 of his essay). I would add that, in general,

The parts can, however, find themselves in conflict with each other, without, consequently, the rational part being able to exercise the duty of leadership. Whenever a condition of conflict between parts emerges, the soul is thrown in the condition of injustice.

Both Good and Evil in the individual come about from the correct or incorrect condition of the soul. Philosophical education exercises the decisive role in the development of justice, since only this kind of education can produce the development of the rational part; without the correct development of the rational part, individuals will be always exposed to the risk of moral degeneration⁶.

In my analysis, the causes of the presence of Evil will be shown through some passages of the *Republic*: I shall first describe Plato's definition of injustice; then, I shall examine a passage in which Plato describes the presence of criminal instincts within us followed by a discussion of the images of the soul confirming the presence of morally difficult elements within our own nature. Lastly, the drama of the human condition will be – at least in my opinion – clear enough.

A FIRST EXAMPLE: THE ROOT OF INJUSTICE IN THE INDIVIDUAL DIMENSION

To begin my analysis, I would like to quote a passage in which Plato describes the nature of injustice⁷; the passage is *Republic* IV, 444a10-b8. Injustice is described by Plato as a conflict among the components of the soul. Just on the basis of this description the reader can observe that the different parts of the soul do not necessarily live in harmony with each other. The parts of the soul are given, but what happens with these parts is open – that is the problem. The possibility of moral degeneration constitutively belongs to the soul, since the incorrect order of the three parts would already be, as such, injustice⁸:

the development of the soul towards the strengthening of the rational part is the presupposition of any morally correct development of the individuals.

⁶ The whole description of the degeneration both of individuals and of constitutions in *Republic* Books VIII and IX shows that something within us morally does not function. This produces every kind of trouble in individuals, in nations and, in general, in human history. Actually, men are always exposed to the risk of moral degeneration. The weaker the philosophical education, the greater the risk of moral degeneration.

⁷ As regards Plato's works, I used, for my analysis, the edition of John Burnet, *Platonis Opera. Recognovit Brevique Adnotatione Critica Instruxit Ioannes Burnet* (5 vols., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1901-1907).

⁸ For this analysis, I consulted the translations of Plato's *Republic* of Allan Bloom (*The Republic of Plato. Second Edition. Translated with Notes and an Interpretive Essay*, BasicBooks, New York and London, 1968); of George Maximilian Antony Grube, which was revised by C.D.C. Reeve (the translation is contained in: *Plato. Complete Works. Edited, with Introduction and Notes, by John M. Cooper; Associate Editor Douglas S. Hutchinson*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1997, pp. 971-1223); of C.D.C. Reeve (*Plato Republic. Translated from the New Standard Greek Text, with Introduction, by C.D.C. Reeve*, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., Indianapolis/Cambridge, 2004); of Paul Shorey (*The Republic. With an English Translation by Paul*

“So be it, I said. After that, we must consider injustice (ἀδικίαν), I think.

Plainly.

Must not this be, in turn, a certain discord (στάσιν τινά) of these three parts, officiousness (πολυπραγμοσύνην) and meddlesomeness (ἀλλοτριπραγμοσύνην) and insurrection (ἐπανάστασιν) of one part against the whole of the soul (τῷ ὅλῳ τῆς ψυχῆς), in order that this part rules, though this is not fitting, since, on the contrary, this part is, by nature, such that it is appropriate for it to serve, whereas not to serve is appropriate for that which belongs to the ruling genus⁹? We shall say something of this sort, I fancy, and we shall say that the disorder (ταραχήν) of these parts and their going astray (πλάνην) is injustice (ἀδικίαν) and intemperance (ἀκολασίαν) and cowardice (δειλίαν) and ignorance (ἀμαθίαν) and, in sum, all vice (κακίαν).

They are precisely this, he said.”

The incorrect disposition of the parts of the soul is injustice. Therefore, first of all, injustice is a condition of the soul. Justice, the harmony of the parts of the soul must be reached, it is not given. Nobody will give it to us. We have only our own mental forces to find the morally correct equilibrium among the parts of the soul¹⁰. The relationships among the parts of the soul are, moreover, not determined from the start: Every soul should be regarded, in my opinion, as a dynamic, and not as a static entity.

The development that every soul will have is not determined from the start, nor are the relationships determined which the parts of the soul will mutually have. In other words, the parts of the soul are certainly given from the start; the development and the reciprocal relations of the parts of the soul are, on the contrary, not determined from the start. The correct education of the soul, therefore, is fundamental. If justice and injustice are correct and incorrect dispositions of the soul, a specific kind of education ought to bring about the correct order of the soul¹¹. Everybody is responsible for the development of his/her own soul. Every

Shorey. In Two Volumes. I Books I-V, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA; William Heinemann LTD, London, Revised and Reprinted 1937 (First Printed 1930)); II Books VI-X, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA; William Heinemann LTD, London, Reprinted 1942 (First Printed 1935). I consulted these translations, however, without following any of them entirely: I tried to find my own translation of the texts of Plato which are quoted in my analysis.

⁹ This section of Plato’s text presents some problems for the translation. For my proposal, I leaned towards Grube’s translation (see p.1075), without following his own words. The difference in the proposed translations is due to different philological reconstructions of Plato’s text. I refer to Burnet’s and to Shorey’s critical apparatuses related to the quoted passage for further explanations on both the difficulties present in Plato’s text and the justification of the possible translations.

¹⁰ For the description of justice, see *Republic IX*, 443c4-444a2. Justice and injustice are in the soul. Just and unjust actions are only the consequence of these conditions.

¹¹ For an investigation on justice as the healthy condition of the soul and injustice as its unhealthy condition, I highly recommend the study of Anthony John Patrick Kenny, *Mental Health in Plato’s Republic* (in *Proceedings of the British Academy* 55 (1971), pp. 229-253). Among other things, Kenny insists – in my opinion correctly – on the value of education as a preventive action against injustice’s coming about in the soul.

soul will have an evolution in a set direction. In other words, indifference about the development of the soul is not allowed because the soul will take a bad path if the individual does not promote the development of his/her rational part. No education, that is, the complete absence of education too, is a bad education.

The three parts of the soul are regarded by Plato, therefore, as immediately possessing a moral potential. The correct disposition of the three parts corresponds to the morally correct composition, which will have good actions as its consequence; any incorrect disposition of the three parts is a morally incorrect disposition which will bring about immoral deeds. The fact that the three regions of the soul can conflict with each other means, in my opinion, that they are not simply life functions integrating each other, so that the life of the individuals can work. Of course, these parts fulfil set life functions, but they are not simply the functions they fulfil. They are, first of all, morally relevant potencies¹². We cannot examine Plato's conception of the soul as though it were the description of the life functions of an individual. Life functions are not excluded from this examination, but they are not the core of Plato's interest in the examination of the soul.

Plato's statement that the soul can degenerate into conflict between its own parts can be read and interpreted, in my opinion, as an admonishment for the individual to become aware of his/her own inner situation and to assume responsibility for his/her own soul not degenerating into conflict¹³. The situation described by Plato is dramatic: Plato is aware that justice is a difficult condition to reach, since it can be reached only through the development of the rational part. The rational part of the soul needs proper development. The Age of Reason, for the human soul, does not arise by itself; the age or the dimension or reason must be reached. Without reaching the dimension of reason, individuals are not protected against the risks of degeneration. The rational part of the soul represents, among other things, the defence instrument against degeneration. The remedy against Evil is, for Plato, philosophy; the therapy, the medicine, and the antidote against the evil elements are the process of acquiring knowledge represented by the philosophical education. Only an education in philosophy can defeat our evil elements, since this is the only kind of education that can arm us mentally against passions, false opinions, bad instincts, and so on¹⁴.

¹² See *Republic* IV, 444c1-445e4, and IX, 588e3-589d4 for the description of the healthy and of the ill condition of the soul.

¹³ We know characters, functions, and potentials of each part of the soul; nonetheless, this does not solve all the questions concerning the soul. The soul will have different developments which will depend on the correctness or incorrectness of the education received. There is not, actually, a soul. There are different concretised souls, i.e., there are different developments of the three parts corresponding to the education received (monarchic/aristocratic, timocratic, oligarchic, democratic, tyrannical). See *Republic* IV, 445d1-7, and VIII, 544d6-545b3.

¹⁴ See, for the ability of the rational part to defend the individual from false opinions, *Republic* IX, 580d3-592b6. *Republic* Book IV explains that the rational part ought to lead the whole soul. *Republic* Book VII exposes the educational programme for the rational part; *Republic* Book IX shows that only the rational part can give the right direction to the whole individual.

**A RADICAL EXAMPLE OF EVIL WITHIN US:
REPUBLIC IX, 571A7-572B8**

I would now like to examine *Republic*¹⁵ IX, 571a7-572b8. This passage belongs to the general description of the degeneration of individuals and of constitutions being exposed by Plato in Books VIII and IX of the *Republic*: it is an integration of the investigation on the structure of the soul exposed by Plato in Book IV and, in my opinion, it is a kind of culmination of the description of negative elements in the soul, of Plato's whole strategy in Books VIII and IX.

I chose this text because it makes significant comments on the presence of evil elements in every man. This presence is a constant danger for the individual and for society. At the same time, I find Plato's description interesting, because it expresses profound worries about the dangerous character of these elements¹⁶. Plato's passage declaring the presence, in us, of criminal elements is the following one:

“As regards our desires (τὸ τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν), it does not seem to me that we adequately distinguished their nature and number¹⁷. If this point, in truth, is lacking, the inquiry which we are inquiring into will be less clear.

Well, – he said –, is it the inquiry on them not still opportune?

By all means: and just consider that aspect of them that I wish to observe. It is this. Of both the unnecessary pleasures and desires, it seems to me that there are some lawless ones (παράνομοι)¹⁸, which, on the one hand, probably¹⁹ appear in everyone, but which, on

¹⁵ For my analysis, I used, as commentaries of Plato's *Republic*, Julia Annas's *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1981; first published 1981, reprinted (with corrections) 1982), and Nicholas P. White's *A Companion to Plato's Republic* (Hackett Publishing Company, Oxford, 1979).

¹⁶ As the title of this paragraph suggests, the example I have chosen is a particularly radical one within the description of the degeneration; the negative tendencies of the individuals are worsening and worsening in the course of the whole description of the degeneration. It should not be forgotten, in this context, that the whole description of the degeneration of the individuals from the best one (monarchic/aristocratic) to the worst one (tyrannical) reveals the tendency in individuals to moral degradation. A progressive degradation proceeds from a virtuous condition to more and more vicious conditions. Therefore, the example I am going to quote in the main text is interesting, but it is not indispensable to adequately demonstrate the tendency to moral degeneration.

¹⁷ This passage is introduced by Plato as an integration and as an extension of the investigation concerning desires and their own nature; this investigation has been expressed in *Republic* VIII, 558d4-559d3.

¹⁸ Among other things, Plato seems, in this passage, at the same time to reveal, to explain, and to warn against the presence of certain extreme desires in the human soul. We have a tendency in us composed of an unlawful kind of desires, that is, it should not seem accidental if some bad events in the individual life or in human history come about. We have, within ourselves, at least the potential to do bad actions.

¹⁹ There is a difference between this part of the exposition and the final summary of the exposition itself, as we shall see, since, at the end of the argument, Plato asserts that all men have these immoral tendencies.

the other hand, when checked both by the laws (νόμων) and by the better desires (βελτιόνων ἐπιθυμιῶν) together with reason (μετὰ λόγου), in some human beings either are entirely eliminated or remain few and weak, while in other human beings they are stronger and more numerous.

Which desires do you mean? – he said –.

Those – I said – that are awakened in sleep whenever the rest of the soul – all that belongs to the rational (λογιστικὸν), tame, and ruling part (ἄρχον) of it – slumbers²⁰, while the beastly (θηριῶδες) and wild (ἄγριον) part²¹, full of foods and drink, springs and, pushing sleep away, seeks to go and to satisfy its dispositions; you know that, in such a state, it dares to do everything, since it has been released and since it has been set free from all shame (αἰσχύνης) and prudence (φρονήσεως). And it does not shrink from attempting to have intercourse, in fancy, with a mother and with anyone else of men, of Gods, and of beasts, and it does not shrink from committing any murder (μυαιφονεῖν), and it abstains from no food: and, in a word, it falls short neither of folly (ἄνοιάς) nor of shamelessness (ἀναισχυντίας).

What you say, – he said, – is very true.

But, on the other hand, I think that, whenever a man is healthy and temperate with himself and goes to sleep²², after, on the one hand, awakening (ἐγείρας) his rational part (λογιστικὸν) and after entertaining it with fair arguments and considerations, after arriving at a meditation on himself, after, on the other hand, neither starving nor overfeeding the appetitive part, in order that this part is put to sleep and in order that it does not cause confusion in the best part, while taking pleasure or while being grieved, but it leaves that best part by itself, alone, pure, to investigate and to reach out for the perception of something that it doesn't know, either of something that has been, or of something that is, or of something that is going to be, and then, after soothing in the same way the spirited part too, he does not fall asleep, while his spirit has been aroused, since he quarrelled with somebody, but when a man, on the one hand, calms these two forms and when, on the other hand, sets in motion the third, in which prudent thinking (τὸ φρονεῖν) comes to be, in that way takes his rest, you know that in such a state he most grasps the truth (τῆς τ' ἀληθείας) and that at that time the visions that are hostile to law (παράνομοι) show up least in his dreams.

I suppose, – he said, – it is exactly that way.

²⁰ I have the impression that in his assertions and descriptions of the condition of the human soul Plato aims to suggest that the rational part may never diminish its attention as regards the control of bad elements (for a confirmation of the necessity of a continuous attention towards these bad elements, see *Republic IX*, 589a6-b7).

²¹ Noteworthy in this description, is, among other things, the opposition between the rational part and bad elements. The fact that our being is a plurality of components is demonstrated by the reciprocal incompatibility of the aims and of the targets of the parts of the soul. This is, in my view, an argument for the presence of an authentic tripartition of the soul and against the opinions of those researchers who are against the interpretation of a real division present in the human soul. The parts of the soul are, of course, in contact with each other, but they nonetheless remain different entities. See the very interesting and accurate study by Christopher Shields, *Plato's Divided Soul in Partitioning the Soul: Debates from Plato to Leibniz*, edited by Klaus Corcilius and Dominik Perler (De Gruyter: Berlin/Boston, 2014, pp. 15-38): Shields contests the presence of separated and mutually independent parts in the human soul in Plato.

²² The precise ways to defeat bad desires or, at least, control them by the individual, is already, as such, a sign of the dangerousness of these kinds of desires. The more numerous the prescriptions, the greater the danger apparently.

Well then, we were led much out of the way, while exposing this subject: what we want to recognize is this, that surely some terrible (δεινόν), savage (ἄγριον), and lawless (ἄνομον) form of desires (ἐπιθυμιῶν εἶδος) is (ἔνεστι)²³ in every man, even in some of us who seem to be entirely moderate (μετρίοις)²⁴; as it seems, this becomes manifest in the dreams²⁵. Consider, then, whether I seem to be saying something²⁶ and whether you agree with me.”
 “Well, I agree.”

The text clearly points out the presence of real tendencies, in my opinion:

– Evil is natural in man; it does not come from outside. We have, in general, a precise tendency to, or a precise potential for moral degeneration represented by a specific kind of desires.

– At least some elements of man’s soul are constitutively inclined to Evil.

– Evil is not the consequence of a faculty used mistakenly, which would exclusively aim at Good, if correctly used. Evil is, on the contrary, an active factor in every human soul. Evil is inside us.

We have seen exactly that injustice is an incorrect disposition of the parts of the soul. In the passage above, we can see that at least some of the desires present in us correspond to criminal intents. We obtain, through this passage, explanations regarding the possible causes of the moral degradation of our own soul. Our nature as such is exposed to moral degeneration. An evil factor constitutively belongs to us. We are this factor, too²⁷.

²³ I think that some texts of Freud describing the structure of the “Es” and the presence in the “Es” of a “Todestrieb” do have similarities with Plato’s description of the evil elements. See, for instance, Sigmund Freud, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, in *Gesammelte Werke. Chronologisch Geordnet. Dreizehnter Band (1920-1924). Sechste Auflage*, S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1969 (1920), pp. 1-70 (in particular pp. 35-66); *Das Ich und das Es*, in *Gesammelte Werke. Chronologisch Geordnet. Dreizehnter Band (1920-1924). Sechste Auflage*, S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1969 (1923), pp. 235-290 (in particular pp. 268-289); *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, in *Gesammelte Werke. Chronologisch Geordnet. Vierzehnter Band. Werke aus den Jahren 1925-1931. Vierte Auflage*, S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1968 (1930), pp. 419-506 (in particular pp 476-481); *Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*, in *Gesammelte Werke. Chronologisch Geordnet. Fünfzehnter Band (1932). Vierte Auflage*, S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1967 (1932) (in particular, pp. 62-86). For an interesting analysis of the possible influence of Plato on Freud see, for instance, the accurate study by Marco Solinas, *Psiche: Platone e Freud. Desiderio, sogno, mania, eros* (Firenze University Press, Firenze, 2008); Anthony John Patrick Kenny too in his study *Mental Health in Plato’s Republic* (Proceedings of the British Academy 55 (1971), pp. 229-253) shows interesting observations on the similarities between Plato and Freud (I shall not deal here with the possible differences between Plato’s and Freud’s interpretation of the soul. This is a subject for a further inquiry).

²⁴ Nobody is excluded, nobody is safe, and nobody is innocent. Nobody can feel morally sure because of the presence of these kinds of desires.

²⁵ Perhaps one of the difficulties connected to the presence of these kinds of desires is that it is not easy to be discovered. It is not easy for the individual to become aware of the existence of this sphere of desires, so that it is not easy to be able to prepare oneself to withstand it. However, everyone ought to become aware of the presence of these elements in one’s own soul. This is the first step towards the successful fight against these dangerous elements.

²⁶ I.e.: “whether it seems that I am talking sense”.

²⁷ We are this factor too, when we find ourselves in the embodied condition (it is possible that our not-embodied soul is different; I shall analyse this question in a further study).

Furthermore, Plato's assertion that these elements do not omit any act of folly or of shamelessness is particularly impressive. This potency dares to do everything and stops at nothing. The description of these kinds of desires concerns not only a determined kind of man, but also every man. All men have this negative moral factor, they all are affected by it, and they all are exposed to its influences. The following sentences, which conclude the quoted passage, are, in my opinion, particularly clear on this subject:

“... surely some terrible (δεινόν), savage (ἄγριον), and lawless (ἄνομον) form of desires (ἐπιθυμιῶν εἶδος) is (ἔνεστί) in every man, even in some of us who seem to be entirely moderate (μετρίοις)...”

Plato's image gives the impression of being, at the same time, a warning and an exhortation directed to every single one of us. We have to be aware that we have this kind of elements in us. We have criminal elements in our own nature. We must consider our own condition and reflect on it in order to find remedies against it. We cannot ignore the existence of these elements within us. On the contrary, we ought to be aware of their presence inside us.

The position of the quoted passage in the *Republic* too is, in my opinion, particularly important. The description of these kinds of desires is contained in the exposition of the degeneration of the best individual and of the best state, which begins in Book VIII and continues in Book IX of the *Republic*. This investigation comes after the description of the programme of education contained in Book VII. After the explanation of his programme of philosophical education, which lays the foundations for the development of the rational part, Plato points out that the best state will also collapse sooner or later. The best state and the best individual are condemned to degeneration, as is the case for every human achievement. This passage, in particular, and the whole description of the degeneration of the individuals adequately show the presence of morally degenerating elements in us²⁸. Hence, the existence of a tendency to moral degeneration will have effects, sooner or later, on the best state, too. For this reason, Plato does not end his examination with the description of the best constitution and of the value of the philosophical education. After dealing with these subjects, he analyses the degeneration of individuals and constitutions. The manifestation of evil aspects returns; evil aspects actually never disappear from the human condition and from Plato's attention²⁹.

²⁸ The quoted passage represents a culmination of the description of evil potentials within us. Actually, the whole description of the degeneration of individuals and of the constitutions illustrates the degradation which every individual is exposed to when the rational part is weak and becoming weaker, so that the description in its entirety is really relevant. The quotation I chose should be inserted into the whole context of degeneration. In other words, degeneration as such is the demonstration that we have bad elements inside us; the quoted text is only a component of the strategy of this demonstration.

²⁹ I have the impression that the whole structure of the *Republic* presents a continuous alternation between morally positive and morally negative aspects. The positions of Thrasymachus, Glaucon, and Adeimantus are contraposed to the initial discussion on the nature of justice in Books I

The description of the degeneration of the constitutions in Book VIII and IX gives the impression that, in spite of the human efforts, every earthly achievement of men is condemned to destruction from the start. It seems that the degenerating elements will prevail as an unavoidable destiny, despite any human attention, education, effort directed against the emergence of the morally degenerating factors³⁰. The insertion as such of the description of the degeneration of the ideal state after the long education programme of Book VII looks, in my opinion, like a warning to be aware of one's own limitation. It is not a warning to resign, but rather a warning to be aware of one's own historical insufficiency. Man is not God³¹. Every earthly achievement of man has, as its own destiny, decadence. Perfection never belongs, in Plato's opinion, to the human condition. Both historically and, so to speak, meta-historically men are insufficient beings. The educational programme of the *Republic* can, undoubtedly, improve the human condition. Philosophy can certainly help. Nonetheless, the natural deficiencies of men cannot be completely eliminated, since they belong to their own nature as such. We must accept this.

ARE THE POSITIONS OF THRASYMACHUS, GLAUCON AND ADEIMANTUS COMPLETELY FALSE?

On the basis of the elements discussed up to now, the positions of Glaucon, Adeimantus, and Thrasymachus, expressed in the first two Books of the *Republic*, and, moreover, the position of Callicles in the *Gorgias*, which, although in different ways, attest the presence of evil tendencies in the individuals, are not, unfortunately, positions that are completely groundless with regard to their connection to our own nature, in my opinion. On the basis of Plato's expositions in *Republic* IV, VIII and IX,

and II. Injustice, in particular, and vices, in general, are then contraposed to justice and to the other virtues in Book IV. Individuals who remain in the dimension of Being and Not-Being are contraposed to the individuals who are able to acknowledge the dimension of Being in Book V. The Cave follows the discussion of the forms of knowledge and the introduction of the Good in Books VI and VII. The degeneration of individuals and of constitutions comes after the description of the correct system of education in Books VII, VIII and IX. Negativity steadily follows positivity, as though Plato wished to point out that negative aspects are always with us in spite of all our positive efforts.

³⁰ A subject that should be analysed is the possibility that the series of degeneration of individuals is interrupted. In my opinion, Plato thinks that the degeneration, once it has begun, cannot be interrupted. Furthermore, if we consider that the human condition finds itself, at least initially, in the difficult situation represented by the image of the Cave, and that, after reaching the correct level of education, the individual lives, nonetheless, under the risk of the moral degeneration, we can acknowledge the entire gravity of the human condition as such.

³¹ Perfection does not belong to the human condition either in the embodied form or in the not-embodied form. The disadvantaged condition of men in comparison with, for instance, the condition of God's is clearly revealed in the myth of the *Phaedrus*, where the degree of contemplation of the superior realm, that is, the realm of Being, the realm of Ideas, is not as good for men as it is for the Gods. Men are inferior entities (and they ought to be aware of their own inferiority). Men cannot attain a perfect philosophical education.

I believe we cannot consider the positions of Glaucon, Adeimantus, Thrasymachus, and Callicles as expressing something completely extraneous to our own nature. Our soul does have, in itself, at least the potential to become like these persons, or to adopt the positions expressed by these persons³². The situation of the *Republic* is, therefore, much more dramatic than it might appear at a first sight. The positions of the mentioned characters are, of course, partial, since the description of the man they provide does not correspond to the whole man. They do correspond, nevertheless, to passions, opinions, instincts, impulses, and tendencies of the individual which, if not controlled, would aim to commit crimes. These positions are directly connected to instincts, behaviours, events both of individuals and of history which can be always observed (for instance, there has been an infinite number of Gyges³³ in human history). Gyges does not come from nothing. He corresponds to precise dispositions of man's embodied soul.

Moreover, the initial condition of man, that is, the condition in which a man has not yet received a philosophical education, corresponds rather to the positions of Glaucon, Adeimantus, Thrasymachus, and Callicles, at least potentially. The appetitive part of men is immediately active. There is, at the beginning of the life of men, no opposition to the appetitive part, since the philosophical education is not present and since this education requires a long process. We were actually born exposed to injustice, rather than oriented to justice. The positions of Thrasymachus, Glaucon and Adeimantus show what would happen, and actually happens, in men and in societies, if the philosophical education is absent. Evil impulses take over in men, and there is nothing withstanding them. The structure of society collapses³⁴. The evil factor does not need education or training, whereas the rational part of men needs development that can be ensured only through a long period of education³⁵. At the beginning of one's life, or, in other words, before the fulfilment of the educational programme, the situation is not neutral between Good and Evil in the soul, it is rather negative. The appetitive part with its evil elements is active, whereas the rational part needs the philosophical education in order to find due moral development³⁶.

³² We have seen that the possibility of injustice is rooted in the nature of the soul and that criminal desires are inside us. In the next paragraph, we shall have a confirmation of the presence within us of a morally difficult component.

³³ The story of Gyges is discussed by Glaucon in *Republic* II, 359c7-360b2.

³⁴ Every environment the individual comes in contact with and is in contact with modifies the subject. This point is clear from the degeneration of the constitutions, too. At the same time, the moral condition of the individual influences the structure and the tendencies of a society. Jonathan Lear, in his study *Open Minded: Working Out the Logic of the Soul* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1998) describes the phenomena of internalisation and externalisation. Conditions of soul and environment in which individuals live always influence each other. This happens both in the perfect constitution and in the degenerated constitution.

³⁵ As I noted, the role of the philosophical education to find efficacious antidotes against the bad elements in us, will be dealt with in another analysis of mine. Philosophy constitutes, in my opinion, a preventive therapy against the tendencies to injustice.

³⁶ Of course, the positions of the mentioned personalities are morally wrong, since, among other things, individuals do not have only the bad dispositions they portray. These positions are false

AN IMAGE OF THE SOUL

As confirmation of the statements of the previously quoted passage, I would like to make some remarks on Plato's description of the tripartition³⁷ of the soul in *Republic IX*, 588b6-e2. The image of the whole soul shown in this text furnishes us with another example of the complex structure of the human soul. The image confirms the internal division of the human soul. It also confirms the presence of wild elements inside the human soul and, in general, of the difficulties of the human condition as such:

“Now then, – I said, – let's discuss with him³⁸, since we agreed, as regards doing injustice (ἀδικεῖν) and doing just things (τὸ δίκαια πράττειν), which power each of them possesses.

“How? – he said –.

By moulding an image of the soul in speech, so that the man who says these things, sees what he said.

Which kind of image? – he said –.

One of such natures as it is told in tales that ancient natures came to be, as the nature of Chimaera, of Scylla, of Cerberus, and all the many natures, which are said to have been many kinds grown naturally together in one.

Yes, – he said, – it is told in the tales of these natures.

Well then, mould a single form (ἰδέαν) for a many-colored (ποικίλου) and many-headed (πολυκεφάλου) beast (θηρίου) that has a ring of heads of tame and savage (ἀγρίων) beasts (θηρίων) and that is able to change them and make all of them grow from itself³⁹.

That's a task for a clever moulder,” – he said –, but, nevertheless, since speech is more easily moulded than wax and the like, let it be moulded.

Now, then, mould another single form for a lion, and a single one for a human being; let the first be by far the greatest, and the second, second in size⁴⁰.

because they aim to reduce individual dispositions only to the bad dispositions. Nonetheless, they express something which is present within us: in this sense they are true.

³⁷ Associated with the question of the tripartition is the question of whether there is an authentic unity of the parts of the soul. This subject as such would require a further analysis, therefore, I shall limit myself to a few remarks: I am of the opinion that every soul experiences a process of unification of the parts which can be correct or incorrect. As we can see in the different developments that one soul can have (i.e. monarchical/aristocratic, timocratic, oligarchic, democratic, tyrannical) one of the parts of the soul, eventually, dominates the other two parts. In order that the unification be a healthy unification, i.e., a kind of unification bringing about a morally good condition, the individual needs the kind of unification led by the rational part of his/her own soul. This can happen, though, only if the rational part is really developed, i.e., only if the rational part experiences the whole philosophical education. Hence, the correct unification of the soul needs the philosophical education. Without it there is no authentic moral unification.

³⁸ The position Plato is referencing here maintains that it is profitable to do injustice for the person who, on the one hand, is completely unjust, but, on the other hand, seems to be just (see *Republic I*, 348b9-10, and *Republic II*, 360c8-361d3).

³⁹ The image as such gives the impression of a soul component that is not easily controlled.

That is easier, – he said, – and the moulding is done.

Well, then, join them, which are three, in one, so that in some way they grow naturally together with each other.

They have been joined, – he said –.

Then mould around them on the outside an image of one, that of the human being, so that to anyone who is not able to see what is inside, but sees only the outer sheath, it seems one animal (ἐν ζῷον φαίνεσθαι), a man.

It has been moulded, – he said –.”

As we can see, the appetitive part is described as a many-headed beast, and the connection with something not easy to be controlled is immediate. Plato points out that at least some elements of this beast are wild. They represent, presumably, morally negative factors, or, at least, factors which, if not adequately guided, controlled, and directed, can lead to morally negative results. The image of the beast, therefore, confirms the presence of negative components in the human soul⁴¹. The fact that this part is the part which can lead to moral degeneration is confirmed by Plato in *Republic* IX, 588e3-592b6. If the rational part is cultivated, justice will be the result. If, on the contrary, this multiform part is cultivated, injustice will come about. No other option is possible. Everyone has to choose a direction.

Noteworthy is, moreover, the contrast between appearance represented by individuals seeming to be just one entity, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, reality, represented by the individuals composed of different elements that each possess at least a certain degree of independence from each other. Appearance deceives the observer. The apparent simplicity of human beings conceals a complex, dark, and partially dangerous structure⁴². The enemy is within us but is protected by a mask.

OBSERVATIONS

Plato clearly expresses that there is a factor in everyone which is able to commit every kind of crime. He does not conceal the gravity of the situation. On the contrary, the whole description in Books VIII and IX expresses the difficulty of the human condition and the perils to which the human condition as such is exposed. Moreover, there is a steady increase in the degree of negativity of degeneration in

⁴⁰ In *Republic* IV, 442a4-b3 it is said, furthermore, that the appetitive part is the greatest part of the soul; this is another warning for the individual to handle this part of the soul carefully.

⁴¹ For the analysis of the conflicts among parts of soul see, for instance, Thomas More Robinson, *Plato's Psychology* (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1995 (1970)), and Anthony William Price, *Mental Conflicts* (Routledge, London and New York, 1995).

⁴² Without a proper investigation on our soul, we cannot be aware of the complexity of its structure.

Books VIII and IX. The death of the best state means the progressive, continuous, and unstoppable degeneration of forms of state and of corresponding individuals, until the absolute degeneration of the tyrant is reached.

There are as many principles of moral degeneration and of Evil as there are individuals, since every individual has the tendency to moral degeneration. Hence, every individual is, or can be, a principle of Evil. The evil factor is an independent potency in the individual. It is an independent force with its own aims and with its own strength. Evil elements are inside us from the very beginning of our own lives.

Every individual is, actually, a divided being, since every individual has, by nature, a multitude of components. Moreover, every individual appears to be, so to speak, a gunpowder barrel that could explode at any moment, if he does not have instruments at his disposal to fight his own negative elements. Every individual has the potential to destroy himself, others, the society, and the state. Every individual can become a prince of darkness. There is, moreover, no definitive escape from these elements in human history. These elements come to the fore every time there is an individual, since these elements are constitutive of the individual nature. The presence of Evil in the individual, in society, in history is, therefore, not an accidental one. It is not due to accidental elements. Evil is not an accident in history.

The remedy against Evil lies in the education and development of the rational part. In order to educate and develop the rational part, an education in philosophy is indispensable. No individual has from the start philosophical contents at his/her disposal. An individual is compelled to acquire philosophical contents. In order to acquire these contents, an individual ought to submit himself/herself to a long process of education. This is, from my standpoint, the greatest difficulty for the individual. Individual life is, so to speak, a handicap race. The rational part of the soul finds itself disadvantaged at the start compared to evil elements. The right order of the soul will not be realised by itself. The right order of the soul is not given.

Without philosophy, men remain in the Cave. The Cave as such is, among other things, a confirmation of the difficult and disadvantaged condition into which individuals are thrown. At least their initial position corresponds to all the limitations represented by the Cave. One of the contents we can gain through the image of the Cave is that we were born and that we live, without philosophy, at the level of opinion, that is, at a level of not possessing the truth. We are exposed to the instability associated with opinion. Opinion means instability of judgment, of character, of life⁴³. We do not have, at our disposal, instruments for assigning the due value to the various parts of reality. We must go out of the Cave, but this is not an easy task at all. Our condition, without philosophical education, is characterised

⁴³ In general, I believe that the existential interpretation of the human condition presented through the image of the Cave should be extended. The difficulties connected to the individual's initial lack of any inkling of the existence of a possible alternative to the dimension which he/she is living in should be pointed out. For instance, imprisonment, absence of orientation, and effort paid in order to go out of the Cave would deserve a reconstruction of the possible emotional condition of the individual connected to these experiences.

by a complete lack of orientation. Therefore, we are exposed to all the bad influences from the inside and outside. As such, in average everyday life, we are always at risk of moral degeneration⁴⁴.

CONCLUSION

I would like to summarise the results of my paper:

- Injustice⁴⁵ corresponds to an incorrect disposition of the parts of the soul. Unjust actions are the consequence of this condition.
- The parts of the soul possess, as such, a moral relevance.
- Evil is innate in men. The roots of Evil are present in every man and are active in every man. Every man is condemned (at least) to the danger of moral degeneration, since every man has evil elements in himself.
- Evil cannot be completely eliminated (at least not as regards the embodied dimension of men), since every man has evil elements within himself. The Evil comes into being together with the very birth of the individuals.
- The point of departure is, for every man, the lack of the right education. Every man begins his life from a disadvantaged condition of the soul and from a disadvantaged dimension of knowledge. The correct moral organisation of the soul must be reached.
- Individuals ought to become aware of the difficulty of their own moral situation. Plato does not conceal the difficulty of the human condition. He shows trust in the fact that at least some individuals – actually, only a few of them – can reach the condition of the right order of the soul.
- Philosophy introduces individuals to a dimension of Being, of Ideas, of Good, which is an alternative to the average way of life. The experience of this dimension is indispensable for the correct education to be reached, and for our average way of life to be transformed into the philosophical one⁴⁶.

⁴⁴ There is an association between degrees of reality, degrees of education, and degrees of morality. We all begin our own life with the lowest conditions.

⁴⁵ Injustice carries with itself all the other kinds of vice.

⁴⁶ For Plato's notion of the necessity of knowledge in order to gain a moral education, see Christopher Bobonich's observations in his book *Plato's Utopia Recast: His later Ethics and Politics* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2002) especially Chapter I, *Philosophers and Non-Philosophers in the Phaedo and the Republic*, pp. 1-88. In a further analysis, I shall deal with the – in my opinion – authentic difference between Plato's notion of ideas and Aristotle's notion of universals. In spite of the undoubtedly great importance to be assigned to the difference between ideas and universals, I think that the root of the divergence between Plato and Aristotle lies in the function attributed by Plato to the realm of Being, to which ideas belong. Plato is searching for a kind of knowledge that can free the individual from the limitations of the average way of life; the knowledge of the realm of Being opens to the individual an alternative dimension of life in comparison with the average dimension of life (i.e., it liberates the individual from the limitations represented by the Cave). The complexity of the theme requires its own analysis.

- Without contact with the alternative dimension, there is no possibility of defeating or, at least, of controlling the evil elements present in the individual.
- Since perfect access to knowledge is not possible for men, men are ontologically insufficient beings.
- Since Evil cannot be eliminated in human history, men are historically insufficient beings.
- Every individual, every political constitution, every society will always be exposed to the threat of moral degeneration. Evil will always appear in human history, or, at least, there will always be the danger of Evil appearing in human history (independently of the particular historical moment) because Evil is rooted in the very structure of men.

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