



## The Development of Plato's Political Theory

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(in my words, not hers) between rights that are foundational and rights that are merely derivative. If foundational, rights cannot be overridden, except by other rights of broadly the same kind or status; and then we really would need a strong concept of "welfare rights" that assimilates them to "property rights" (in the manner of Reich's "new property," perhaps) to justify tax-transfer systems. If merely derivative, rights can be overridden on the selfsame grounds that they were instituted in the first place—here, on grounds of social welfare.

This is a fruitful reformulation of points that have heretofore been, at best, only half-appreciated. But, as often happens, a clear statement simply serves to bring clearly into view flaws in the argument. Here, it is the proposition that that which is derivative can simply be overridden by that from which it is derived. What that formulation crucially omits is history. That which is derivative *could have been* overridden by that from which it is derived, had we decided to do so in the very first instance, when first planning our social institutions. But, having established institutions of private property and allowed people to invest their energies and resources and, perhaps, personalities in them, a new principle comes into play; and it is in some deep sense unfair, and not merely counterproductive of social welfare, to take that property from them now—especially without compensation, as is done in tax-transfer systems. Of course, Becker is right to say that considerations of social welfare will usually be sufficiently strong to override such considerations of fairness, on any sensible scale of what matters most morally. But that reply is to miss the point. The beauty of Becker's initial strategy was to suggest that there could be no question about the legitimacy of trading like for like in overriding property rights in favor of social-welfare programs. The force of the fairness reply is that, whatever considerations may initially have guided us in establishing institutions of private property, once they have been established considerations of *another kind* come into play. It is no longer just a matter of trading like for like, and, that being so, those who want to argue for the incommensurability or strong priority of this new kind of consideration now have an opening for defending property in that way—an opening that

Becker's initial strategy had hoped to deny them.

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### **The Development of Plato's Political Theory.**

By George Klosko (New York: Methuen, 1986. xx, 263 p. \$31.00, cloth; \$11.50, paper).

While professedly "not intended primarily for specialists" Klosko's work is also more than an introduction. Specialists, too, will benefit. And while he claims to prefer "to be reliable rather than new," few students of Plato's political thought will come away from this work without seeing at least certain questions differently. It proposes a familiar idea—that there is an evolution in Plato's thought from early to late. The work is original and important because of the nature of the evolution Klosko discovers and how he demonstrates it.

At the center are Plato's conception of the human soul and the possibilities and strategies that exist for moral improvement. The view of the younger Plato (the Socrates of the "early" dialogues) was too simple, too one-sidedly intellectualistic. The soul is treated by Socrates in these dialogues as though it consisted of reason alone. Moral failure is regarded in these works as "a case of intellectual error" (p. 44), and moral correction becomes an academic exercise, an exercise in rational debate. Political consequences follow: avoid public life (one cannot debate a crowd) and attempt to improve others by strengthening through philosophical discourse the health and vigor of the rational faculty. To become good is to become knowledgeable; virtue is correct knowledge.

At some point, perhaps still while he was composing the earlier works, Plato came to see an error in the Socratic position. Not reason alone, but also passion and appetite constitute the human soul. Moral error is now traced not to a failure of knowledge but to a predominance of appetite and passion over reason. Political language is used to convey this idea; appetites rule, reason is enslaved. Given these new psychological views, "Plato must reject the idea that arguments alone can change characters" (p. 50). Since the rational faculties

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## 1987 Book Reviews: Political Theory

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of most people are "held hostage by their desires . . . there is a definite limit to what arguments can do to help them" (p. 51). There are obviously important political implications for this new conception of the soul, and these are fully worked out in the *Republic*. Reasoned discourse still plays a role, but now within the context of "a tightly controlled city of people having virtue imposed upon them from without" (p. 129). The Socratic ideal of morally autonomous individuals gives way to a society in which people are instructed what to believe and how to behave; habituation largely takes the place of open inquiry. Only philosophers are any longer believed to be capable of genuine virtue, and "even in their case this is possible only because they too are subjected to rigorous conditioning in their youth."

Plato's view improves upon the Socratic, Klosko thinks, by recognizing the complexity of the human soul and so allowing for genuine psychological conflict. It also entails a more exalted conception of human knowledge, based as it now is on the Forms. But withal it is a more pessimistic view, emphasizing rigorous indoctrination and the impossibility of the many ever achieving genuine knowledge and moral autonomy. Plato's view darkens still further in the later works, the *Statesman* and the *Laws*: here even the philosopher ideal is largely abandoned. In his old age Plato settles for a "second-best" rule of law. Genuine virtue now appears beyond all reach.

How much of the mature Plato (i.e., the Plato of the *Republic*) is already present in the early dialogues is not made clear, but Klosko does concede something to the so-called "unity" view of the corpus: Plato "points in the direction of" his mature philosophy and "hints at the shortcomings" of Socratic thought, even in the early works. But the emphasis is on change, and at the center of this is the psychology. Although Klosko does not explicitly assign causality, the suggestion is strong that the other facets of Plato's thought moved in response to changes in this part.

There are, perhaps, some minor quarrels. Why a change in the psychological views should have entailed a change in the epistemology and metaphysics—particularly why the tripartite soul should have necessitated the theory of the Forms and the scheme of education described in the *Republic*—is not entirely

clear. Klosko generally urges a connectedness to these various developments but sometimes leaves the precise connections somewhat obscure. More attention, too, might have been accorded to the theological underpinnings of virtue in both Socrates and Plato—Socrates' divine voice and what may take its place in the *Republic*, the persistently mysterious Form of the Good, shored up in some measure by the myth of the afterlife in Book 10. Such a treatment might have entailed a greater emphasis on the continuities between the early and middle strata, at least by showing Socrates to have been less one-sidedly intellectualistic than Klosko find him to be.

But these are points of emphasis, not wholesale criticisms. Klosko has offered political theorists a work that is long overdue—a comprehensive discussion of the political theory embedded in the whole Platonic corpus. Nothing on its scale has appeared since Barker's classic *Greek Political Theory* (1918), and few scholars are better equipped to do it today than Klosko. His reading is sympathetic—some fine comments are reserved in defense of Plato against his critics, notably Popper—and his scholarship is impressive. The work will serve well those whose interest in political theory originates with its awakening in the Greek world of Socrates and Plato.

CURTIS JOHNSON

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**Alexis de Tocqueville: His Social and Political Theory.** By Whitney Pope (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1986. 210 p. \$16.95, cloth; \$8.95, paper).

Pope observes, toward the end of this brief book, that Tocqueville works "within what he considers an established tradition of history, social science and moral philosophy dating back at least to the ancient Greek philosophers" and that he "feels no need to establish a new science" (p. 109). Despite recognition of this fact, Pope's own approach to Tocqueville is largely dominated by the assumption that an authoritative body of social-science theory developed chiefly in the twentieth century provides the best framework for arguing Tocqueville's importance. Tocque-