

PLATO, POPPER AND THE OPEN SOCIETY: REFLECTIONS ON WHO MIGHT HAVE THE LAST LAUGH*

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Unlike Nathaniel in the Gospel, in whom there was no guile, I am afraid that our chairman, John Cody, is one in whom there is nothing but guile. For what did he do? He set as the topic for this session, "Popper, Plato, and the Open Society," and he invited me of all people to address myself to the topic, knowing full well that I don't like Popper, that despite any pretensions of mine to the contrary, I don't understand Plato, and that my appreciation for the Open Society—at least as Popper would understand that term—is nothing if not suspect. And lest you think that, rather than guile in John Cody, this only betokens a stupidity on his part that he should have chosen so inept and inappropriate a performer for this evening's session, just consider what the Cody calculations amount to in this case. Thus he figured that, given the assignment in my title I would try (1) to bomb Popper, (2) to refurbish the long tarnished reputation of poor Plato, and (3) in the process, whether by advertence or inadvertence, to cast a number of aspersions upon the Open Society. But of course, Cody reckoned, the fruits of my effort would be quite other than those I would myself intend. For in betraying my petty animus against Popper, as well as my gross misunderstanding of Plato, any animadversions that I might choose to make respecting that Open Society, so dear to libertarians, would turn out to be entirely counterproductive. For you would all leave the banquet table, and go out of the room, with your faith in Popper restored, your suspicions of Plato confirmed, and for no other reason than that you would have just had a demonstration of how it is only the likes of me who would set themselves up as opponents of the former and champions of the latter. And as for the Open Society and libertarianism, the mere fact that I should have been the one to denigrate it would prove sufficient to send all of you on your way, rejoicing all the more in your redoubled determination to champion all of the things that I had sought to decry.

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So much for the Cody machinations. But believe it or not, I am going to try to foil those machinations and to undo, right here and now, the guileful John who devised them. First, I don't propose to try to defend Plato this evening. On the contrary, I am myself very concerned lest the sort of political program laid down by Plato in the *Republic* could well lead to just such evils as we should all of us associate with the closed society, which I would hope we would all be agreed in justly deploring. Second, as for the redoubtable Sir Karl, far be it from me to try to bomb him from this podium, if either I would or could. True, I don't happen to think his particular line of attack on Plato in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, to have been either well-mounted or well-executed. For it was not the error of any "historicism" as Popper would call it, that, it would seem to me, was responsible for leading Plato down "the primrose path to the everlasting bonfire" of totalitarianism. No, I just don't believe that Plato was a historicist. Marx, to be sure, may well have been one. Yet Plato was no Marx, nor Marx Plato. And while I should doubtless be the first to want to emend a bit the words of the Old Testament Jehovah, and to proclaim that "the sins of the [philosophical] fathers will be descended upon the children, even unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me," I just don't believe that Plato could properly be regarded as the philosophical father of Karl Marx at all—at least not in this respect.

Be that as it may, though, what I should really like to explore with you this evening is not so much whether Popper may have made some right criticisms of Plato, and yet perhaps for the wrong reasons; but whether, in making his criticisms, Popper may not have been so carried away by the anathemas that he wished to hurl at Plato that he quite carelessly threw out one particular Platonic concept or principle that he, Popper, could well have turned to his own purposes. Yes, I might even go farther and say that without that one key philosophical notion of Plato's, Popper's own philosophical purposes with respect to what I might loosely call Libertarianism and the Open Society could well turn out to be not merely unattainable, but perhaps even insupportable and indefensible.

And what, then, is that Platonic baby that it would seem to me Popper so carelessly threw out with the Platonic bath-water? Well, to put it at first quite bluntly and, I am afraid, with no little initial implausibility, I should say that what Popper tossed out so confidently, and seemingly with no second thoughts at all, was precisely Plato's notion of the Forms that things somehow participate in, or, as Aristotle might have said, the natures or essences of things, or the thesis that there are Ideas in Plato's sense—although it must be admitted that that latter term is rather thoroughly misleading when taken in our sense of that term. But no matter, in the present context, the Form or Idea that is of moment is none other than the

Form of man, or the nature or essence of man or of the human person just as such. For is not a human being, just *by nature*, as an Aristotelian might put it, precisely the kind of being, and indeed the altogether distinctive kind of being, who both can and ought to make something of himself? Even more than that, is it not incumbent upon him just in virtue of his being the human being that he is, that he should take stock of himself, just *qua* human being, and that he should recognize that as a human being he perhaps is not all that he might be or could be or even should be, and that it accordingly behooves him to do something about it? Yes, is it not his responsibility to bestir himself, and to consider what sort of a being that as a human being he is cut out to be, and so to try to become the human person that he truly is and ought to be? In this respect, a man isn't like any mere acorn or tadpole or cocoon, that will just automatically grow and develop into a tree or a frog or a butterfly, if the conditions are right. No, he's got to do it himself, for being human and living your life as a human being is quite patently and inescapably a do-it-yourself job. Oh, I don't mean that friends and relatives and social institutions and society generally may not help—yes, even be absolutely indispensable—; and yet when all is said and done, don't we all of us just have to recognize that no one else can live our lives for us, or can make us to be what we can be and ought to be just as human beings—not papa with his millions; not the welfare state with all of its social services in the way of old age benefits, police and fire protection, public transportation, aid to education, abortion on demand, or heaven knows what else; not even God himself—none of these various agents or agencies can, as such, guarantee or possibly bring it about that a human being, you and I or anyone else, should become truly human, or should live his life in such wise as befits a human being, as opposed, say, to any mere dog or toad or grub worm; or even as opposed to the likes of a Stalin or a Hitler or a Judas Iscariot, or a Uriah Heep, or an Iago, or a Casper Milquetoast, or whatever other perversion of the human you might care to mention.

In other words, what I am suggesting is that the philosophical legacy of Plato, that Popper chose to renounce, is just this notion that, by his very nature as a person or as a human being, a man has a job to do, a natural end or goal, a kind of natural fulfillment or perfecting of himself that he needs to aim at and strive for, that no one else—no, not any power under heaven or even in heaven—can achieve for him, and that he's simply got to do himself. Yes, suppose, in order to bring out more fully the import of this notion of the Form or Idea of man or of the nature of man that I am suggesting Plato was so insistent upon—suppose that I just reverse the order of priorities as between ethics and politics that Plato somewhat tentatively suggested in the *Republic*. For there, you will remember, Plato begins directly in Book I to raise the question of justice: "What is justice?"; and more specifically the

question as to justice in the life of the individual. And this, I take it, in Plato's eyes amounted to no more than the basic ethical question as to how a person ought to order his life, what ought he to live for, what need he do, as a human being? Nevertheless, just after the beginning of Book II of the *Republic*, Plato proposes to answer this question as to what the right life or the just life for the individual is, by making a kind of detour into the domain of the *polis* and into the political community. Perhaps we can better determine what justice is in the individual, Plato says in effect, if we first consider "justice writ large," or justice in the *polis* or in the political community.

Now I am suggesting that we might reverse Plato's order, and that we first consider what it is that our nature demands of us as individual human beings, and only subsequently consider what may be required of us, or what it might be right for us to do, or how we need to live our lives considered as members of the political community and of society. And the reason I believe that it could be thus helpful and illuminating to reverse Plato's order of priorities, and to consider the ethical before the political, is that no sooner is it determined that quite apart from any whims or preferences or choices on our part, we simply are by nature, and all of us as individuals, the kinds of beings who need to make something of ourselves, and who in the final analysis cannot let anybody do this for us—we've got to do it ourselves—as soon as we recognize this, we can then see that not only are certain responsibilities incumbent upon us as individuals, but also that certain constraints are naturally imposed upon our fellow human beings and upon society to respect the natural obligations and needs and requirements that are incumbent upon us by our very nature as individual human beings. In other words, there is a natural basis for both our responsibilities and our human freedoms and our liberties as individuals—a basis that is grounded in man's very nature or essence or Form or Idea, as Plato might call it.

But Popper, as I suggested, would simply reject outright any such notion of a human nature, as would bring with it all of the associated notions of a natural human end or goal, as well as of our natural human responsibilities and rights. Why, though, will Popper thus have nothing to do with Plato's idea of the Form or Essence of man? For however much Plato may have misunderstood or perhaps even abused the implications of such a notion with respect to the social dimensions of man's existence and the whole issue of an open vs. a closed society, Popper certainly need not have fallen into such misunderstandings or abuses himself. Quite the contrary, is it not just man's very nature that not only warrants but demands an openness in and of society, as contrasted with the closed society that Popper so much abhors? And yet Popper will have none of this. Why not?

Well, I believe that there are two sorts or types of considerations that led Popper to reject so summarily any such notion as that of either Plato or

Aristotle concerning man's very nature, or man's form or essence. Of these two sets of considerations, the one set, I believe, has to do with Popper's fascination, yes, one is almost tempted to say with his beguilement at the hands of the scientists. True, Popper could hardly be called a scientist himself; and yet he was certainly very knowledgeable about science. In fact, I should even be tempted to say that he was far more knowledgeable about science than he was about philosophy. And this is why, I am afraid, he rather uncritically assumed, and then proceeded to teach and even to preach that the contemporary philosopher ought to go to school to the contemporary scientist. And of course one of the lessons which Popper thinks the now long dim-witted philosophers will have to learn in that school is or ought to be the obvious one that there just are no values in the facts. As Popper himself remarks, almost at the very end of his career and in the concluding pages of his autobiography, "So much of the talk about values is just hot air."¹ Accordingly, if man's very nature or essence, as Plato would conceive of it, has certain ends and values built right into it, Popper would say that a Platonic essentialism of this stripe just could not be other than even more hot air: no scientifically controlled investigation of the facts could ever disclose anything of the kind.

More fundamentally, though, it isn't just a case of science being unable to uncover in the facts any natural end or goal for man, or any naturally determined values or natural obligations or natural rights either—be it either in the facts of World I or World II, as Popper calls them—in addition one needs to take cognizance of Popper's own particular and even somewhat original view of the character of scientific investigation and of the logic of scientific discovery. For when it comes to the great overarching theories and hypotheses of modern science, it must not be thought that these theories rest on observation or experiment—so Popper thinks—or are established in any way by induction. No, they are simply dreamed up or invented by the great scientific genius, much as the theme of a symphony or the plot of a novel is devised or made up by the great composer or the great novelist. Not only that, but such scientific theories as are thus the creations of scientific genius are not thought of as being in any sense subsequently verified by the facts—as if having been invented and made up by the scientist, as it were out of whole cloth, they were then found rather miraculously to correspond to the facts and so to be an accurate description or representation of them. No, scientific theories are not even supposed to be representations of the way things are. They are not conceived or devised in such a manner as might enable them to serve as copies or blueprints of the facts. Instead, they are more like instruments or devices that enable us to get about among the facts, as it were, to get a certain purchase on them, so as to enable us the better to control them; and yet as everyone knows, the fishing tackle that one uses to

lure and hook the fish is not as such a representation of what the fish himself is like or even of what the bottom of the lake is like from which the poor fish gets lured. Or a better set of metaphors for characterizing scientific theories might be those of a more Kantian inspiration. For as Kant would have it, our categories and our so-called forms of intuition represent only our human ways of structuring and ordering and organizing our experience of things, and not necessarily the ways such things are in themselves. That is to say, the world as the scientist talks about it and considers it is not necessarily the way the world or reality is in itself; rather it is but the way the world and reality appear to us to be as viewed and reflected through the conceptual frameworks and scientific theories that we have devised and constructed and through which all of our experience of reality must then be screened and filtered.

Now in a way this last suggestion may somewhat outrun Popper's own account of the role of scientific theories in knowledge. For Popper would perhaps hesitate to go quite so far as to say that we never know reality or the facts as they really are, but only as they appear to us to be from the standpoint and in the light of the particular scientific theories from which we happen to be viewing the world. After all, much as Popper would insist that a scientific theory can never be verified as being a true representation of the way things are, he nevertheless wants to insist that scientific theories can be falsified. Hence even though science, strictly speaking, can never tell us the way things are, it can tell us at least some of the ways things are not. True, many of Popper's followers have pressed him hard on this very point, maintaining that by his own account of the nature of science, a so-called scientific view of the world is no more falsifiable than it is verifiable through further observation and experiment.

Be that as it may, though, this dispute between Popper and many of his followers is of no direct concern to our present purposes. For when it comes to theories about human life and human existence, or about our human situation generally, Popper would in many instances want to distinguish such theories rather sharply from regular scientific theories. For theories of the former type would many of them lie on the far side of that celebrated line of demarcation that Popper makes so much of; in consequence, it would seem that any and all views that we may happen to project as to what the values in life are, and how we ought to conduct ourselves or order our lives, these are all views that are susceptible of neither verification nor falsification either one. Consequently, what such theories of human nature and human life, and even of the values in life, really amount to is just that: they are merely our ways of viewing our lives, the particular constructions that we may happen to have chosen to place upon our human existence, and as such, being neither verifiable nor falsifiable, they are but so many inventions and

creations of our own, which we may find attractive to us, or repellent to us, as the case may be, but of which we can never say that they are either true or false.

Against this background, then, we can perhaps begin to determine a little more clearly just what it is that Popper finds so wrong-headed and so mistaken about Plato's insistence that there is a Form or Essence of man, that there is a real human nature, in the light of which we can truly reckon alike what our proper opportunities and responsibilities in life are, and thus gain some sort of genuine knowledge and rational understanding of what we ought to do and how we need conduct ourselves in the various walks of both our private and public life.

Not at all, Popper would say. There just isn't any human nature and there aren't any real norms or standards of human life and human existence, as it were, written into the very nature of things. Scientific investigation discloses nothing of this sort. Nor is it merely a case of science having gone thus far and in fact not discovered anything on the order of a human nature or Form or Essence of man; much more to the point is it that scientific investigations, and rational investigation generally, are in principle incapable of ever making any such disclosures, for the very reason that theories, whether they be of human nature or of nature generally, are never any more than our own human inventions—i.e., merely our chosen ways of looking at things, or the particular preferred constructions that we may happen to have placed upon things. Consequently, it is ridiculous that with Plato, or with Aristotle, or indeed with almost the entire tradition of Western thought prior to Kant, anyone in the present day should suppose that there really is any such thing as a human nature, or that our views as to the ethical reaches of our lives and of what we ought to do or ought not to do could lay claim to being true or false either one. No, at the most, such projected and invented theories about the realities of our human existence and our human worth, while different ones of them will surely strike us as appealing or repulsive, attractive or repugnant, there just never is any sense in which they can be held to be either true or false.

So much, then, for a summary account of the first set of reasons why Popper would reject out of hand Plato's insistence upon there really being such a thing as a human nature or an Idea or Form of man. No, Popper would say, such a theory just isn't scientifically warranted either in fact or in principle, and if not scientifically warranted then it isn't warranted at all. But over and above this type of Popperian objection to Plato's or Aristotle's view of the Form of man or the Nature or Essence of man, there is another seemingly different, and yet still curiously cognate, objection to what we might call the ancient natural law theory of human life and existence. This time Popper's objection would be not so much scientific, as almost existen-

tialist in character. For is not the very idea of what might be called a fixed human nature, that determines both our options and our responsibilities in life—must not such a notion effect a kind of closure with respect to our human life and existence in its individual dimension, that would be comparable to that closure in the so-called closed society that Popper so inveighs against in the social dimension? Indeed, there are not a few passages in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* where Popper's eloquence is almost in a Sartrean vein. "Norms," he says,

are man-made in the sense that we must blame nobody but ourselves for them; neither nature, nor God.²

Yes,

. . . norms and normative laws can be made and changed by man, more especially by a decision or convention to observe them or to alter them, . . . it is therefore man who is responsible for them.³

We must not blind ourselves to

. . . our fear of admitting to ourselves that the responsibility for our ethical decisions is entirely ours and can be shifted on to nobody else; neither to God nor to nature, nor to society, nor to history. All these ethical theories [i.e., such theories as I have loosely termed natural law theories like Plato's and Aristotle's] attempt to find somebody, or perhaps some argument to take the burden from us. But we cannot shirk this responsibility. Whatever authority we accept, it is we who accept it. We only deceive ourselves if we do not realize this simple point.⁴

Incidentally, it is not a little ironical that this very kind of Popperian insistence upon our absolute individual responsibility, not just for our actions, but for the very standards by which we judge our actions is reminiscent alike of Jean-Paul Sartre and, *horribile dictu*, of Adolf Hitler as well, as readers of *Mein Kampf* may well remember with something of a shudder. But no matter about this, for the significance of these quoted passages from Popper lies precisely in the fact that in his view nothing like any such supposed nature of man, or the natural laws of human responsibilities and rights, should be allowed to effect a closure with respect to our human freedom. In other words, not only does science provide us with no evidence of there being any such natural moral laws or natural norms in the world of fact, but in addition any such fancied human nature or essence of man can never be more than our own human invention, which we ourselves have simply conjured up and imposed upon the facts, with the result that human beings, in so far as they are thought to exemplify such a nature or essence, are nothing but human beings conceived quite literally in our own image, an image that we ourselves have made up and for which we are entirely responsible.

Besides, what is interesting is that despite these strictures of his upon any Idea of human nature or of the Form or Essence of man, Popper for his own part would not have us desist from such image making ourselves, or from propounding such fictions about what man is or even ought to be, as we may happen to favor. No, he would have us only acknowledge that they are but fictions, and that they represent to us not what man is, but only what we ourselves may have chosen to pretend that he is. That is to say, they are but so many images or fictions in terms of which we have come to view ourselves and our fellow human beings and which we can then but cast aside and replace with others simply at will. Nor is Popper himself at all behindhand in dreaming up favorite images or fiction of his own in regard to our human nature and our character as human beings and then trying to push this as vigorously as he can. Thus in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, he limns a view of man which he says was not unlike the view of many of the Sophists of ancient Greece, those whom Popper heralds as having belonged to what he calls "The Great Generation," and who propounded their own "noble lie," as it were, about man and society, which reactionaries like Plato and Aristotle did their best to frustrate and oppose. In any event, those ideals of human life and human society which Popper would have us take over from The Great Generation and now incorporate into a fictionalized image of man for the present day would involve such things as individualism, altruism, humanitarianism, equalitarianism, freedom and rationalism.

Moreover, what Popper himself would particularly wish to stress as being startling and significant about this image or picture of man, which he thus puts forward and which he would have us embrace as our own contemporary ideal, is just the fact that it is so different from the ancient Platonic or Aristotelian ideal. And yet is it? Frankly, I am not so sure that the two fictions or ideals—the Popperian and the Platonic—are so different in their content after all. Still the point, it seems to me, is not so much whether and how they differ in their content; rather it is that the ground and basis for such images or views of man are so radically different in the case of Popper from what they are in the case of Plato. For Plato would insist that in his account of what it means to be a human being, he is telling you what the nature of man really is and what it requires and demands of us in fact and in reality, and whether we like it or not, or whether initially we happen to find ourselves pleased or repelled by it. In contrast, Popper would insist that his image of man and of human society, and of what these respectively ought to be, is nothing if not a sheer invention. In other words, Popper is inviting us to engage in a game of "let's pretend" as regards our human nature, whereas Plato is trying to get us to face up to what we really are.

Yes, it is even possible to point up further this feature of the contrast between Plato's view of man and Popper's in terms of Popper's later

writings, particularly in *Objective Knowledge* and in the two volumes of the Schilpp *Festschrift*. For there Popper tells us rather more about how he thinks both he himself and all of us are able to come by such favorite views and fictions about human nature and our human situation. It is to World 3, as Popper says, that we need to turn as the source and fountainhead of all of our inventions and fictions and projects of whatever nature. For what is World 3, if not a vast attic or storehouse in which we human beings are free to rummage about, and in which we will find a collection of all conceivable and even imaginable objects—mathematical systems; ideals for living; plots for novels; musical themes that might have been but never were, as well as those that once were in vogue and are now no more so; scientific hypotheses and theories, alike conceivable ones and actual ones; value systems of every possible kind; mathematical constructs—you name it! Anything and everything imaginable is there and presumably at our disposal in World 3. Yes, some commentators have even been perhaps a bit unkind in hinting that Popper's World 3 represents no more than a somewhat belated and unacknowledged concession on Popper's part to Plato's World of Ideas! But not so, really. For one readily recognizes the radical difference and divergence alike in ontological status and in ontological function of World 3 on the one hand and of the so-called World of Ideas on the other. With Plato the Forms really are. Not only that, but more particularly they are what we are as well. Yes, Plato would say, we human beings are what we are only to the extent to which we "participate" in the true Form of man or of human life. And to the extent to which our "participation" (to use Plato's term again) in our true nature as men and in all the responsibilities that go with our thus being human—to the extent to which this participation is but a feeble or half-hearted or unenlightened one, to that same extent our performance in life as human beings cannot be other than feeble or foolish or pathetic or generally inadequate.

How very differently, though, does Popper conceive the situation. For him that entire, limitless range of possibles that go to make up his World 3, so far from being the very forms and essences of things, or the very norms and standards of the very being of things and of their performance, amount instead to no more than so many fictions and fashions of how we may take things to be, of what we may read into and onto them, and ultimately of the arbitrary constructions that we just happen to choose to place upon the world. Using Plato's term "Forms," we might say that for Plato the Forms are the forms of what things really are, and in this sense of what we are constrained and restricted to being, whereas for Popper the Forms are but so many inventions and free creations in terms of which we can dress things up, as it were, and so conceive them to be whatever we choose to make them to be or want them to be.

And so it is that by some such counterposing of his own version of World 3 to the traditional variants on Plato's World of Ideas that Popper thinks he can guarantee what we might call his libertarianism of the individual, as contrasted with that inevitable closure upon individual freedom, to say nothing of the still more inevitable totalitarianism in the body politic as a whole, that Popper thinks are the necessary consequences of anything like a Platonic essentialism or Theory of Forms. But is it so really? Has Popper really succeeded in providing a philosophical basis for the freedom of the individual and the openness of society by simply repudiating the traditional Platonic and Aristotelian view of human nature and of the natural responsibilities and obligations that are incumbent upon man by virtue of his very nature? Perhaps but a little reflection should convince us that Popper's program, for all of its seeming initial plausibility, is after all rather easier said than done.

Take, first of all, the supposed Popperian guarantees of the freedom of the individual. It is a freedom, Popper thinks, that each of us has, simply to choose his own image or ideal of what a human being should be or of the good life for man and of what it ought to be. Not only that, but Popper immediately follows this up with his own recommendation as to what he thinks that image of man is that all of us ought to choose and thus freely embrace. It is the image of man as free, as rational, as altruistic, as a happy denizen of the Open Society, etc. All well and good! Yet still, do we not need to ask just why this particular image of man should be the preferred one? True, all of us, say, as red-blooded, upstanding, liberal-minded Americans will doubtless thrill to such an image as Popper has painted of what might be called the libertarian ideal. And yet ought not such an ideal have more going for it than the mere fact that some of us—maybe even all of us—happen to like it or maybe even to thrill to it? For are there not all sorts of other human ideals that, perhaps not we ourselves, but certainly any number of other human beings have thrilled to, if not in the present day then certainly in times past, or that they will thrill to in times future? Why, then, suppose that our particular thriller—that is to say, Popper's favorite thriller—is the only thriller there is?

For instance, take Plato's image of man. Why not choose that image, say, rather than the Popperian image? Remember that Popper himself would be the first to say that while Plato is indeed mistaken in supposing that there is a real nature of man or Form of man, there is no denying that Plato did project what in Popper's eyes could certainly be considered an image of man, of man as immured in the closed society, and which, Popper would therefore insist, differs *toto caelo* from his own (Popper's) image of man. Once again, I am not so sure that in content Plato's image of man is so different from Popper's after all. But no matter, for whether Popper's and Plato's images

differ from one another so decisively in their content, or not, there are countless others that do so differ—Marx's image, say, or perhaps Nietzsche's, or Tolstoy's, or the Epicureans', or Genghis Khan's or Jeb Magruder's or whomever's. And so which to choose? Now to such a question, I believe, Popper not only fails to give an answer; he can't give an answer. Yes, I suggest that even to the specific question of why Popper's image of man rather than Plato's, Popper can give no answer. For by his own philosophical principles, he must insist that on the scientific view of the universe, which he has always cherished and been so insistent upon, there is no possible basis in fact for holding any one ideal or image of man to be in any way superior to any other. And even if he were to put forward his own ideal as a kind of hypothesis in which he would maintain the superiority of that ideal as over against Plato's, let us say, then by his own principles poor Popper would have to admit that such an hypothesis is unmistakably on the far side of that celebrated "line of demarcation" of his, and as such is incapable not just of verification but even of falsification in human experience. In other words, Popper's particular libertarian vision of man is not one whit better, and has nothing more going for it than let us say Plato's totalitarian vision. True, Popper can indeed say that he happens to like his own vision and to be far more attracted to it than he is to Plato's. But then Plato could just as easily make rejoinder by saying that he is more attracted to his own ideal than he is to Popper's. And so, *de gustibus non disputandum!*

Nor would it seem possible to try to defend Popper at this point by maintaining that he himself has anticipated this entire line of criticism, and that he has attempted to meet it by simply admitting that there can of course be no proper knowledge of the supposed fact that his own image and ideal of man is superior, say, to Plato's. Instead, this is all a domain not of knowledge, but of faith. And so, indeed, Popper does urge his readers, not just implicitly, but in so many words, to have faith—"faith in reason, freedom, and the brotherhood of all men."⁵ Thus he points out how in Athens following the Peloponnesian War some men did come to have just such a faith—not Thucydides, to be sure, not Sophocles, not Plato, but Protagoras and Hippias—and the many others of what Popper likes to designate in capital letters as being of "The Great Generation." As he says, they, indeed, did share what he calls "the new faith, and as I believe, the only possible faith of the open society."⁶

Alas, though, when one reads passages such as these, one is inclined to say that much as in other contexts Popper would seem to display far more understanding of science than he does of philosophy, so in this context Popper would appear to have but little understanding of what might be properly called religious faith! For in any religious faith worthy of the name, the faithful need ever to keep in mind the nature of the difference between

what they consider their own faith to be and sheer credulity. It is true that they will concede that in fact and in the present they may lack anything like a sufficient evidence for the faith that is within them; but what they must not and cannot say is that such evidence is in principle impossible. Rather, the situation in which they consider themselves to be in the role of faithful believers is always one of "Now we see through a glass darkly but then face to face," or at least something analogous to this. In contrast, a Popperian faith is not simply one that is without a sufficient evidence in the present circumstances and conditions of this life, say. Rather it is a faith in which it is admitted that not only do we not now know what the ground for such a faith may happen to be, but also one in which we now know, and know absolutely and as it were *a priori*, that there is no ground and can be no ground for it whatsoever. Instead, Popper's faith in the Open Society—at least to judge by the logic of Popper's over-all philosophical position and even implicitly by his own admission—amounts to no more than a sort of child's game of "Let's pretend"—let's pretend that man should be free and fraternal and rational, let's pretend that man should be allowed to bask in the pure air of an Open Society; let's pretend that such is the way man is and ought to be—and let's pretend it, even as we admit that it is all only a fiction and not a reality at all, only a pretend game, and one that is not and cannot be anything for real.

And so it would seem that while, in wanting to guarantee the absolute freedom of the individual's choice in his way of life and in his ideal for living, Popper has cast out anything and everything that would smack of Plato's Forms, or more generally of the whole natural law tradition in ethics, the upshot would seem to be that what Popper is left with is a situation in which there can be no intelligent or informed human choices of any kind, free or otherwise. Instead, our human freedom under the circumstances reduces to nothing other than a sheer and utter arbitrariness.

Moreover, no sooner do we move, in Popper's scheme of things, from the human individual's situation of utter arbitrariness to our human social situation, in which in Popper's terms, we must face up to the issue of the open society vs. the closed society, than again the question becomes "Which shall it be?" and "Which alternative shall we choose, and for what reasons?" Alas, the resolution of such a question scarcely bids fair to being a very felicitous one, not to say a very intelligent one—at least not on Popperian principles. And suppose that instead of trying to make the resolution in terms of a quotation from Sir Karl's autobiography, we quote instead from the autobiography of the late great, if unspeakable, Benito Mussolini:

In Germany relativism is an exceedingly daring and subversive theoretical construction (perhaps Germany's philosophical revenge which may

herald the military revenge). In Italy, relativism is simply a fact. . . . Everything I have said and done in these last years is relativism by intuition. . . . If relativism signifies contempt for fixed categories and men who claim to be the bearers of an objective, immortal truth . . . then there is nothing more relativistic than Fascist attitudes and activity. . . . From the fact that all ideologies are of equal value, that all ideologies are mere fictions, the modern relativist infers that everybody has the right to create for himself his own ideology and to attempt to enforce it with all the energy of which he is capable.⁷

Surely, Popper would not wish to follow anything like the Mussolini Society. And yet the embarrassing thing is, what could he say against it? Would it not be better for him to return to Plato, and to take up the stone which the builders rejected and make it the head of the corner? For that stone is none other than man's very nature, the true nature and essence of man and of what he ought to be. Here surely, is a proper instrument for the legitimation of the Open Society. And even if we were to agree that Plato himself misused and abused that instrument, why could not Popper have taken it up and used it to better advantage, rather than casting it out and thus condemning his own recommendation of the Open Society to the very thing that Popper claimed he was going to be most scrupulous about avoiding, viz. a sheer, complete, and utter arbitrariness?

NOTES

1. Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of Karl Popper*, 2 vols. (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1974), p. 154.
2. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 2 vols. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1945), p. 51.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 161.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
7. Benito Mussolini, *Diuturna*, pp. 374-77. Quoted from Helmut Kuhn, *Freedom Forgotten and Remembered* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1943), pp. 17-18.