

PLATO'S CONCEPTION OF HEALTH

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Most philosophers have an answer to the question 'What is the chief good for man?'. Plato gives his answer to this question in The Republic. In the first book various current answers are given. Among these, one is a violent declaration that the chief good for a man is to have unlimited power so that he can rule others, take whatever he pleases from others, and, in a word, enjoy the advantages of being an unrestricted tyrant. This doctrine reminds one of some of the current philosophies in justification of war.

Plato turns aside from this and other current answers to give his own. He says that the chief good for a man and for a state is Health. Health, ~~xx~~ according to Plato, means in a man that he is full of life and that all the parts of this life work in harmony, the lower being duly subordinate to the higher. Plato recognizes the place of appetite as a legitimate part of life, and also the place of spirit, meaning by spirit that which makes a man fit. But he insists that the impulse to eat and the impulse to fight must be subordinated to reason. Where there is lack of due subordination and harmony, there is disease - which is the cause of all misery and the cause of death. In like manner, a healthy state is one in which there is abounding life of many sorts, but all working together in harmony. Where harmony is lacking, there is social disease and misery and the ruin of the state.

In many details, Plato's doctrines are outworn. It is doubtful, however, whether anyone has proposed a more fundamental philosophy of politics for the good state or a more fundamental law of good life for the individual.