

SEMINARS ON PLATONISM AND THE WORLD CRISIS

Novosibirsk, August 2007

Issues and Texts

Seminar 1: Thursday, Aug. 9: Plato and the Environment (Natural and Social)

1. General remarks on the concepts of progress and steady state.
2. Should one determine on a proper population level for a given environment to support, and stick to that? Texts: *Laws* 5, 734 -8, 740-1
3. Should one limit minimum and maximum degrees of wealth in society? Texts: *Laws* 5, 739-40; 741-5.
4. Re-cycling of waste and avoidance of pollution – no explicit texts, but general emphasis on reverence for indigenous gods and spirits.
5. Plato is deeply suspicious of external influences on his state, either from citizens going abroad, or from visitors coming, and wishes to impose strict controls on both – an impossible ideal, in the age of satellite TV and the Internet! Text: *Laws* 12. 949-53.

SEMINARS ON PLATONISM AND THE WORLD CRISIS

Novosibirsk, August 2007

Issues and Texts

Seminar 2: Friday, Aug. 10: Plato and Religion.

1. General remarks on the question of the mode of 'truth' characteristic of religious doctrines. Is it inevitable that one system of 'truth' excludes all the others? And does this in turn imply that adherents of all other systems must be either converted or wiped out?

2. Plato is insistent on religious observance of a traditional type, but we must ask what is really behind this. Texts: *Laws* 4. 717; 5. 738; 745; 8, 828. 3. Plato is convinced that atheism, or any of the other two faulty beliefs about the gods which he identifies in Book 10 (that the gods exist, but do not care for mankind; or that they exist and care, but can be deflected from imposing just punishment by prayers and sacrifices) is a major impulse towards immorality and crime. The latter beliefs, indeed, are only encouraged by the traditional portrayal of the gods by the poets. Text: *Laws* 10. 884-8.

3. Behind all this there is the deep conviction that the world (*kosmos*) is ordered by a rational, benign, though not strictly *personal* force (Intelligent Design!). This turns out to be a rational world soul. But where does this leave the traditional gods? In general, how can Plato move so easily from talk of the World Soul to talk of 'the gods'? And why does it seem to him axiomatic that if 'the gods' exist, they must exercise providential care (*pronoia*) over every detail of human existence? Texts: *Laws*. 10. 895-7; 899-907.

SEMINARS ON PLATONISM AND THE WORLD CRISIS

Novosibirsk, August 2007

Issues and Texts

Seminar 3: Saturday, Aug. 11: Plato and Social Order.

1. General remarks on the question of the duties (as well as the rights) of citizenship, and on citizenship as an 'art' (*tekhnē*). Is modern western-style liberal democracy dangerously neglecting this aspect of citizenship?

2. Plato sees education (*paideia*) as a holistic activity, not just something to be confined to school, or indeed to youthful years. Education begins in the womb, continues in infancy with carefully constructed Montessori-style play, and continues from there to adulthood. Plato's emphasis on preparation for battle we may discount, but the ideal of fitness is to be cherished, in face of the current tendency to obesity in the young due to junk food and passive entertainments. Texts: *Laws* 2. 652-6; 5. 727-9; 6. 764-6; 7 *passim*.

3. Plato is much concerned with the preservation of social order, and with the issue of respect for age and wisdom, but also of respect for the young by their elders, and of citizens for one another. Lastly, is there any case for some version of his 'Nocturnal Council' (cf. the Central Committee of the Communist Party, or the Supreme Religious Council in Iran)? Texts: *Laws* 3. 689-91; 5. 729-31; 6. 756-8; 12. 960-9.