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Politeia

A passage from Plato on the decay of authority and the coming of tyranny

Plato

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ABSTRACT

The text reproduces a passage from Plato's Politeia (The Republic), written around 400 B.C. and translated by Prof. Dr. Erwin Theodor Rosenthal. In the excerpt, the philosopher describes the scene of social disorder that precedes tyranny: teachers who fear their students rather than guiding them with a firm hand, inexperienced youths who put themselves on a par with their elders, old people who lower themselves to the young in search of easy favor, and a youth diverted from its proper course and in revolt against the most basic obligations, having never learned to obey the precepts necessary for social coexistence. The conclusion warns that, in such circumstances, the utmost caution is required, for 'tyranny is knocking at the door.' It is a brief quotation, with no additional commentary from the editor.

KEYWORDS: *plato; politeia; tyranny; education; authority; social coexistence*

translated by Prof. Dr. Erwin Theodor Rosenthal

"When teachers, instead of leading their students with a firm hand along the right path, feel intimidated before them and marvel at the contempt the pupils show them; when the inexperienced dare to place themselves on a par with their elders and betters, confronting them in words and deeds, while the old mingle with the young in order to win easy favor, ignoring or even taking part in their misdeeds so as to appear neither doddering nor authoritarian; when the young, diverted from their proper course, feel constrained and rebel against the most elementary obligations, since no one ever taught them to obey those precepts without which there can be no social coexistence, then the utmost caution is called for: tyranny is knocking at the door." (Politeia, Plato, circa 400 B.C.)

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