

The Image of the Ideal Person or Plato on the Nature, Place and the Tragic Fate of Philosophers in the *Republic*

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Abstract: Plato describes the philosopher in the *Republic* as an ideal person, but taken in his dialectical contradiction. Therefore, the article is based on a textual analysis of Plato's works in the historical and philosophical vein, considers the question of the ideal and «false philosophers», their nature, functions in public life, position in the State structure. Complicated contradictory relationship of the ideal philosophers with the State power is shown in the article. On the one hand, they should pursue their higher predestination, and perceive the Good spending the contemplative life. On the other hand, as the citizens of the State, they should for the sake of people bring the supreme knowledge to public life. But the materialization of ideas is always connected with big problems. The false philosophers are only apparently philosophers. They are ready to actively participate in the political life of the country because of their psychology and goals. Unfortunately being greedy and ambitious they become not a source of creation, but a source of destruction of the spiritual and moral foundations of the State and man. In the modern world the role and responsibility of true philosophers is incredibly increasing due to the emergence of a global civilization facing the face of a third world war. In this context, let's recall that the main function of philosophy - that Plato told about - is the development of the worldview which values may affect the adoption of practical solutions to improve the world and make it safer.

Keywords: Plato, Aristotle, philosopher, pseudo-philosopher, *Republic*

INTRODUCTION

Plato lived at the time of social reforms, during the «axial time» (Karl Jaspers), in the «age of teachers», when in different regions of our planet at the same time the wise men, philosophers, teachers and mentors, whose ideas inspired humanity for many centuries, entered the arena of the spiritual life. It was the time of formation of the

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spiritual aspect of civilizations, when the cultural archetypes of thinking and behavior of people were laid. In this sense, Plato's ideas about philosophers are still relevant today, as they remind modern thinkers not to forget about their important and tragic role in public life. The ideas of Plato about philosophy and philosophers have always attracted the attention of foreign and Russian thinkers who, from different angles and with different degree of depth, studied his teachings (Asmus 1975; Losev and Taho-Godi 1993; Shejnman-Topshtejn 1978; Ogurtsov 2011; Panfilov 1997; Rakcheeva 2001; Santas 2010; Zuckert 2009). But there are not enough studies on the subject I deal with. We will try to fill this gap.

The most important political work of Plato is the *Republic*, which portrayed a social utopia in the historical dynamics. In this work he was trying «to mold in the imagination» (Plato 1994, IV 420c), i.e. to simulate the process of the emergence of the State and to show its essence. This method has become the main method of Plato's works (Kazaryan 1987). Here Plato described in detail three main classes that form the society. These are philosophers, warriors and farmers, artisans and merchants. According to Plato, philosophers make the top elite layer in an ideal society. They carry out the function of think tank and control the State, since they correspond to the highest «reasonable layer of the soul», which is immortal. Ferrari rightly notes: «The philosophical element is divine and immortal, the other elements are mortal and animal» (Ferrari 2007, 166).

But in a real historical society, which is ruled by the lower class, people care little about the Truth for the simple reason that they are dominated by «fierce» or «lustful» emotions or lower parts of the soul. Everyone pursues only earthly goals, trying to satisfy their ambitions, or the maximum comfort in their life. In such societies most philosophers are often out of work.

THE NATURE OF THE IDEAL PHILOSOPHER

Plato, trying to understand and define the nature of the ideal philosopher, begins with an important statement that «some people by their very nature, ought to be philosophers and the rulers of the state...» (Plato 1994, VI 491b.) In other words, the controversial issue of the primacy of natural or social origin Plato decides in favor of nature: a philosopher needs to be born, and it is impossible to become a philosopher of one's own volition. Philosophers «are seldom born

among people – only as the exception» (Ibid., V 474c). There are a lot of people but few lovers of wisdom, if not to say very few.

Plato (1994, V 575c) notices the philosophers' natural affinity to cognitive activity in the broadest sense of the word. He says: «And who is willing to eat from any science, and who is happy to learn and in this respect insatiable, has a right to be called a philosopher...». He stresses that the true philosopher «lusts after... all the wisdom in general» (Ibid., V 475b), being a lover of wisdom. But the philosopher seeks not just some knowledge and wisdom, but true knowledge. He «loves to see the Truths» (Ibid., V 475e). Finally, he «is always to strive for the divine and the human in their totality» (Ibid., VI 486a). In other words, the philosopher is busy shaping the worldview, without which nobody can do if they want to be human. To achieve this, the philosopher should have «a natural subtlety of mind, the originality of which would make the person receptive to the idea of all things» (Ibid., VI 486d).

However, here it is necessary to make one remark. The fact is that the «genuine philosophers» are joined by those who love the ascetic way of life and philosophy, treat it with a special piety, but at the same time are dogmatists. We are talking about the Pythagoreans, about whom «we can say that such “philosophers”, on the one hand, are hungry for the true Logos, and on the other, do not see that it is immersed in them in mythos». As Irina Protopopova (2016, 171) observes, the concept of «genuine philosophers» is used in this context with mild irony and mockery. Nevertheless, all these philosophers are opposed to the crowd, which stagnates in ignorance, and to those people who pretend to be philosophers, but in reality they are false philosophers.

The aspirations for true knowledge and wisdom come up against various obstacles, and presuppose that philosophers have to be fearless, strong-willed and decisive in their intention to reach the Truth. Thanks to these qualities, true philosophers go to the ends of the earth to understand and defend the Truth, through all obstacles, without stopping and turning back, like the soldiers on the field of battle or athletes in competition. Therefore, Socrates said - citing the example of Democritus - that «the philosopher is like a pentathlete» (Diogenes Laertius, IX 37). Democritus «really was a pentathlete in philosophy as he studied physics, ethics, mathematics and the whole range of knowledge and even in the arts was fully experienced» (Ibid.). A common «person spends his current life in sleep and dreams, and

before he awakens here, he goes to Hades to finally fall into a sleep» (Plato 1994, VII 534d).

SELF-IMPROVEMENT AS A CONDITION OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL WAY OF LIFE

To achieve their noble objectives, philosophers are obliged to constantly work on their nature, in particular, on their subconscious. Every man (even philosophers) has some kind of imperfection in nature – lustful or irrational part of the soul, which is particularly active during sleep (Plato 1994, IX 572b). Now, lovers of wisdom unlike ordinary people, continuously monitor their subconscious. An important characteristic of philosophers is that they «subordinate bestial side of their nature, to human, or rather, perhaps, to the divine...» (Ibid., IX 589d) If this is not done, then, according to Aristotle, the existence of good people in the dream will be no different from the lives of the wicked (Aristotle 1984, I 1102b 13 3-11).

Plato thoroughly describes the technology of this work. It consists in the fact that it is necessary before sleep, first, to intensify one's reasonable, divine part of the soul that it would protect and defend the person during sleep (Plato 1994, IX 571d). Secondly, it is necessary to subdue constantly violent and lustful elements in their nature (Ibid., IX 572a). Most ordinary people «cannot afford to cope with those things that are inside him...» (Ibid.). They are just ordinary slaves of their passions, like Plato said, toys or dolls in the hands of gods or demons.

However, those methods that Plato offers for working with subconscious, only at the time of sleep inhibit the expression of «violent» and «lustful» elements the man began. Plato does not only deal with the subconscious. He is trying to go beyond human nature and to know God as the highest Good. In this regard, Plato in the dialogue *Menon* considers the mythological and dialectical (ascending dialectics) ways, and in the dialogue *Symposium* speaks of the erotic (alogical) way of knowing God (Plato 1970). All three ways are designed to help man fulfill the main task of life – knowledge of God and God-likeness. According to Plato, the wise man is that who has become like God; as Diogenes Laertius (III 76) writes: «the ultimate goal is to become like God ...».

Later in the Christian tradition specific techniques and methods of work on sinful thoughts, experiences and feelings have been developed. These techniques were aimed at transforming and

spiritualizing the whole man by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ (Chelyshev, 2004).

OBSTACLES AND TEMPTATIONS IN THE LIFE OF A PHILOSOPHER

It is important that the philosopher should be an honest man, «decent and not mercenary» (Plato 1994, VI 486b. Of course, a philosopher, like any normal person should eat, drink and dress. In the ideal *Republic* of Plato this problem is easily solved. There a philosopher is on welfare of the state not to be distracted from the creative work. But in other social structures philosophers have to worry about their daily bread. Therefore, they are tested by life itself. The problem comes to what the main motivation of their activity is: money or the Truth. Plato is sincerely convinced that philosophers should not waste themselves in pursuit of money. This activity is suitable for anyone, but not for them. A comprehensive answer will be given by Christ later on: «But seek you first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you» (*The Holly Bible* 1990, Mat. 6: 33). In other words, if a philosopher, as any other man, remains faithful to his ideals, loves wisdom and seeks the Truth, then the material side of the problem in the required degree for life will be solved by itself. However, «wealth and every kind of sufficiency» (Plato 1994, VI 495a) associated with pleasures, «caress our soul with their attractiveness» (Ibid., VII 538d) and lead us (philosophers) away from philosophy. They can also become vain and arrogant because of their unique abilities and betray their main historic mission in life.

Philosophers living in the historical state beset not only subjective but also objective temptations; among them a bad attitude of the authorities takes not the last place. Plato writes with sorrow that in the real state the «situation of most decent people is so hard that nothing could be worse» (Plato 1994, VI 488a). Devoting to philosophy all their life, they sometimes fall out of social life and become not needed and not fit for public activities. They, Plato says, «for the most part become very strange, not to say completely worthless... useless for the state» (Ibid., VI 487d). The thing is that these philosophers have to lead a double life. They, on the one hand, by their very nature and by occupation – contemplators of God, and do «not want to deal with human activities; for their souls always strive upwards» (Ibid., VII 517d). But, on the other hand, they have to live in this world and from time to time to engage in useful public life (Ibid., VI 499b). But those

who are in positions of authority, according to Plato, are often reluctant or unable to find worthy work for philosophers in society. Therefore, philosophers have to worry about their social position, pestering the rich (Ibid., VI 489 b). Plato personally faced this problem. His involvement in public life reduced to three unsuccessful attempts to convince the rulers (the Sicilian tyrants Dionysius the Elder and Dionysius the Younger) to transform the structure of their state in accordance with his scrupulously and lovingly thought out plan. The disappointment that befell Plato as a result of as a result of communication with the rulers was expressed in the passage of the «noble helmsman» (Ibid., VI 488ae) full of tragic irony.

According to Plato, the people, who were subjected to social exile (ostracism), or sick, or people of a great soul remain faithful to the philosophy – all three of these categories have a chance to protect their inner world from the pernicious, corrupting influence of the crowd, which Plato compares with a wild animal. Socrates, knowing the animal power of the crowd, for a long time had been persuading his disciple, the young ambitious Alcibiades to withdraw from his political career. This dialogue ends with a touching admonition of Socrates to his pupil: «Well, if you would remain of this opinion... it's fear, however, not because I don't trust your temper, but because I see the strength of our city – if it might destroy you and me» (Plato 1986, I 135e). In these words the tragic fate of Alcibiades and Socrates was foretold. Alcibiades, exiled from Athens, was killed in 404 before Christ, trying to escape, and Socrates was overpowered by the «crowd» in 399 before Christ (Ibid, Notes on *Alcibiades I*, 533). If the philosopher dares to engage in political activities, he will definitely face an essential problem. He will have to live by the laws of the system. In his actions, the way of life he will have to follow strict rules of the struggle for power, but not his own moral principles. At best, they would make him leave a certain political party. «If a person, as if he found himself among the beasts and would not wish to work with them creating an injustice, he might not be able to cope alone with all the wild opponents, and before he has time to benefit the state or his friends, he would die without being of benefit to himself and others» (Plato 1994, VI 496d).

Plato in his *Republic* painted a portrait of a special group of people, ideal philosophers, who by their nature are superior and better than ordinary people. The Neoplatonists Plotinus and Proclus tried to

realize in their life this dream of Plato about the ideal philosopher seeking God (Chelyshev 2010, 35-48).

THE DIALECTICAL ANTIPODES PHILOSOPHERS – «PSEUDO-PHILOSOPHERS»

A reflection on the «pseudo-philosophers» (although this term is not used in his writings), which are the dialectical antipodes of true philosophers takes a special place in the teachings of Plato. Such unworthy philosophers defile the good name of philosophy and bring the reproaches of various kinds upon it (Plato 1994, VI 495c-d). Usually in the literature the «pseudo-philosophers» are treated as the sophists. For example, after Aristotle Alexey Losev writes, «a sophist is a pseudo-philosophers who wishes to look like a wise man to please ignorant people» (Losev and Taho-Godi 1993, 118). But we will consider this concept in a broader sense in accordance with the ideas of Plato in the *Republic*.

How do these pseudo-philosophers come to philosophy? The thing is that compared to conventional craft, according to Plato, philosophy «is still a lot more in honor» (Plato 1994, VI 495d). It attracts people from other spheres of life to it. They are «happy to make the leap from craft to philosophy – especially those who are smarter in their miserable little business» (Ibid.). But a difficult childhood, poor upbringing and education, hard work lead to the fact that to the philosophy these people come with an overstrained body and soul: «Their body is maimed by craft and production, and their souls are broken and exhausted by rough labor; it's inevitable» (Ibid.). Such people, as Plato says, resemble «a wealthy blacksmith, bald and stocky, who was recently released from prison, washed in the bath, bought a new coat and dressed. Well, just the groom! Yes, he is going to marry the daughter of his master, taking advantage of his poverty and helplessness» (Ibid.).

Most important, according to Plato, to protect the philosophy from people who are morally inferior and despicable. These people, while developing their minor humanitarian skills, acquire some logical reasoning and begin to use it for selfish purposes, for personal material gain (Plato 1994, VI 519a). Such «craftsmen» in order to achieve their nefarious purposes turn everything upside-down, proving that white is black and black is white, depriving the people of traditional religious, moral and artistic landmarks. Therefore, they are molesters and destroyers of the people and tarnish the good name of philosophy in

the eyes of society. But the real philosopher becomes Master, the owner of perfect knowledge (Borodaj 2008), and always helps people improve spiritually.

CONCLUSION

Only in the ideal State, according to Plato, the philosopher is held in high esteem, occupying his own place in life. Here he easily learns that his soul is in communion with God, and he could lead «divine life» (Plato 1994, VI 498b). We may partly agree with Plato that «none of the current state structures is worthy of the nature of the philosopher» (Ibid., VI 497b). In this regard, we may recall the expulsion of Anaxagoras from Athens and the death sentence to Socrates in antiquity (Losev and Taho-Godi 1993, 19, 27-33), the imposition of the anathema (Herem) on Spinoza in the new time, «the philosophical steamer», on which the best thinkers of modern times were expelled from Russia. The words of Anaxagoras: «I did not lose Athens, but the Athenians lost me» may become the symbol of the tragic fate of genuine philosophers of different eras.

However, in today's global world, the role of philosophy and philosophers is incredibly increasing. Its main feature is the development of culture of theoretical thinking and a worldview that directly affects the process of development and adoption of practical solutions. It helps to see universal trends of world development, the dynamics of the interaction and interdependence of its parts, which is especially important in modern conditions of the confrontation of world civilizations on the brink of the third World war.

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