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## **Plato's *The Republic* recovered. A few ethical, economic and social aspects in contemporary dialogues\***

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### **Abstract**

The main purpose of the article is the presentation and interpretation of some ethical, economic and social aspects in the works of Plato. The division of labour, wealth, the meaning of money, use of interest and paying taxes are the most interesting problems in Plato's vision of *The Republic*. There one can also find some current problems such as the attitude of citizens towards their states, the ethical standards required of the authorities or the role of women. This article was written in the form of a dialogue; the same as the works of Plato.

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Max Weber stressed the need to combine the discussion on economics with the sphere of ethics. He considered limiting economics to only numbers, statistics, or market and stock exchange mechanisms to be a fatal mistake.<sup>1</sup> Studying this issue, one should not be confined only to the knowledge of modern economists or philosophers.<sup>2</sup> One also needs to familiarise oneself with the works of such philosophers who functioned at the point where various branches of science met, making interdisciplinary discoveries and providing timeless advice. Plato was undoubtedly such an individual. Living in Athens at the turn of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, the philosopher provided the interpretation of his views on social and political topics primarily in his two most comprehensive writings, *The Republic* and *The Laws*.

Plato presented his thoughts in the form of dialogue. This form should encourage modern readers to reach for his works. Their pages show our cultural ancestors meeting one another in the realities of the ancient world and conversing on a variety of topics. These are certainly not trivial conversations or conversation out of touch with reality. The discussion revolves around issues related to politics, aesthetics, literature and philosophy, in order to seek answers to questions that have always preoccupied people—how to live, what is important in life, and what should guide us while choosing a particular path in life. It would be good not to let the tradition of such conversations die in our times. Because if art is a dialogue, and dialogue is art, then science should also be based on dialogue.

The aim of our dialogue is, therefore, to bring closer and interpret those Platonic views in which one can find issues concerning the relationships between ethics, economics and social problems.

**R.M.** By heaven!<sup>3</sup> If one reads the Platonic theory of state in a cursory manner, its author could be suspected of communist leanings. It is so easy to attribute an erroneous meaning to the thought of the creator of the Athens Academy. According to the famous intellectual John Kenneth Galbraith: “Plato’s inclination to communism, however partial, has been a source of no slight concern for the more sensitive historians of the subject.” Additionally, Galbraith cited Alexander Gray who argues that:

Plato’s state is the communism of a limited group, communism of the military encampment; it is not at all committed—like later manifestations—to revolt or to concepts of social, economic and political equality. On the contrary, it divides firmly as between the rulers and the ruled; the beautiful and the damned; there is no true communist tendency here. (Galbraith, 2017, p. 19)

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<sup>1</sup> As interpreted by Kapuściński (2002, p. 123). Kapuściński used the work of Max Weber *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

<sup>2</sup> A retrospective review of the relationship between ethics and economics in considerations of economists, sociologists or philosophers was presented in, among others, the work of Dzionek-Kozłowska & R. Matera, *Ethics in Economic Thought: Selected Issues and Various Perspectives* (2015).

<sup>3</sup> This apostrophe to god is one of the exclamation used by the participants in the conversations in Plato’s *The Republic* when they want to emphasise their emotional state.

In any case, in order to be able to agree or disagree with the Master, it is necessary to clearly separate the description of the ideal state—a certain model for a real city—and the real state, which is only an imperfect reflection of the idea of the state. It is worth considering what we actually need the state for. Plato (2008/2016, II 369 b) states plainly that

[...] as we have many wants, and many persons are needed to supply them, one takes a helper for one purpose and another for another; and when these partners and helpers are gathered together in one habitation the body of inhabitants is termed a State.

Thus, the division of labour is born. We have vast needs, but our capabilities are limited; hence, we are literally condemned to rely on one another.

**A.G.** In Plato's *The Republic*, Socrates states that everyone should do what their natural predispositions tell them to do. And because each person has one talent, they can perform only one job. Thus, an individual's innate abilities determine his or her role and place in the social structure of polis (Plato, 2008/2016, II, 370 a–c). Taking one's proper place in society is extremely important because social justice, which is the guarantor of the stability of the state, is based on the best performance of tasks entrusted to citizens on the basis of their abilities.

**P.M.** What appeals to me in Plato's concept of the state is the fact that he did not want to create the "welfare state" only for the chosen; it was supposed to be a place for all "righteous" citizens. Plato recommends that everyone, both the ruling and the ruled, should lead a modest and simple life. He promotes the "golden mean": wealth is "the parent of luxury and indolence", while poverty "of meanness and viciousness, and both of discontent." By not inviting artists, hair-dressers and chefs to his state, the philosopher ridicules the desire for glamour and wealth just for show. He does not allow any excess: neither drunkenness nor too affluent-looking outfits (Plato, 2008/2016, III, 404 e). Worse still, the awakened lusts of body and soul lead to greed and the desire to be superior to others. This is the origin of wars that often destroy states. Plato probably does not believe in the possibility of avoiding wars, as in his reflections on the ideal state he devotes a great deal of space to raising soldiers.

**A.G.** It should be noted, however, that Socrates, in his conversation with Adeimantus and Glaucon, creates not one vision of the state, but in fact four. The first vision is described as healthy or primitive because the inhabitants lead a simple, modest life, striving to satisfy basic life needs connected with the provision of food, clothing and shelter (Plato, 2008/2016, II, 369b–372c). This original vision is modified after criticism from Glaucon, who called it a polis for pigs (Plato, 2008/2016, II, 372d). Socrates, therefore, introduces changes to the original community of farmers, builders and weavers. The state in a further stage of development expands due to the necessity to satisfy all the needs of its inhabitants, and the healthy polis transforms into a diseased one when the existing balance is disturbed, and the desire for pleasure and the need for possessions come to the fore, which inevitably leads to excess and disease (Plato, 2008/2016, II, 372c–376e).

The third vision presents us with the purified polis, as Voegelin (2009, p. 160) calls it, or the military one, as Zygmuntowicz (2011, p. 107) calls it. The desire to possess more and more requires the expansion of the army as, at some point, conflict with neighbours will prove inevitable. Therefore, it is necessary to expand military structures that would ensure security. Introducing the system of raising guardians, Plato adopts the traditional model of Greek education based on gymnastics and music. He “purifies” it, however, by removing the content, forms and rhythms that may affect the souls of the students in an inappropriate manner. And only in the fourth model of the state can we find the polis of philosophers, in which the lovers of wisdom rule (Plato, 2008/2016, 449a–541b). Perfectly educated, prepared to rule and familiarised with the concept of Good, philosophers shape their own souls and the state according to their formula, devoting themselves totally to public service.

**P.M.** But I am intrigued by the question of how Plato intended to achieve such a change in human nature so as to eliminate vanity and snobbery. Plato sought to remove temptations primarily from the rulers of the state and their helpers (guardians). He prohibited them from owning any property, entrusting their support to the public. “[...] neither should they have a private house or store closed against anyone who has a mind to enter” (Plato, 2008/2016, III, 416 d). Considering the lack of possibility at the time to deposit one’s savings in discrete Swiss bank accounts, it seems that people who would take on the burden of ruling were few and far between. A lack of material motivation, a ban on having a family, very high moral requirements, a total lack of privacy (communal meals and bedrooms!) make the ruling elite true “servants of society”, but completely dehumanised. Reading Plato’s words, we have the impression that he is teetering on the edge of absurdity or is even being ironic. And yet we ourselves demand from our representatives in the governing bodies complete dedication to work for the benefit of the public. To achieve this, the discipline proposed by Plato should, in fact, be applied.

**A.G.** It must be admitted, however, that Plato’s vision, though idealistic, is not completely detached from reality. In democratic Athens, remuneration for various offices and public functions was not introduced immediately, but only in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, when an allowance for participation in the Assembly, in which all Athenian citizens were required to take part (cf. Hansen, 1999, p. 160), was introduced. In Sparta, on the other hand, the Spartans, i.e., full-fledged citizens, spent most time in their own group, regularly performing military exercises and having communal meals, although they had their own houses and land, which formed the basis of their financial support and was cultivated by slaves—helots.

**R.M.** “Very true”.<sup>4</sup> And that is how Plato should probably be read today, so that his utopia will not become a sterile product of rationalistic illusions and the entire historical tradition will not be destroyed in these simplified economic, political and psychological issues. Kołakowski warns against the fact that utopia is an escape from religion, inherited customs, as well as national and biological factors,

<sup>4</sup> This expression is often used by the interlocutors in *The Republic* to express appreciation for the words of the previous speaker.

and that the harmfulness of utopia lies in the fact that it only refers to privileged classes (1988, p. 485). For Plato, the ruling, who are compared to gold, are such a class, and they must ensure so that the hierarchy is maintained. They should be supported by silver helpers, while successive social strata of iron farmers and brass craftsmen, merchants or mercenaries perform service functions, dealing with farming and craft activities. It is in the upper classes where the sphere of ethics comes to the fore, while economic issues play practically no role at all. Market, trade, money and interests apply only to the inferior classes. They are attached to material goods, and they are the ones who decide how the market is shaped. And here Plato comes in with his valuable comments on the extent to which the existing economic system is healthy and when it becomes diseased.

According to the philosopher, people have so much wisdom that after achieving a certain material status they allow themselves to enjoy multiple types of entertainment, but “hymning the praises of the gods, in happy converse with one another. And they will take care that their families do not exceed their means; having an eye to poverty or war” (Plato, 2008/2016, II, 372b–c). Plato is strongly offended by the splendour and vanity of people who are not satisfied with the possession of basic goods. He presents an entire list of products that go beyond basic necessities, including houses, clothes and shoes. He mentions, among others, couches, perfumes, incense, sweets, carpets, gold, ivory or girls. When the city is already stuffed with such “goods”, it needs also to be filled with actors, dancers and choristers. How can harmony be achieved in such a community? The ruling class is responsible for that. It is the duty of this class to regulate the distribution of material goods among the lower social groups. Is Plato highlighting here the line between the delicate intervention of the state in economic relations and the influence comparable to the centrally planned economy known from the “real socialism” countries of the not-too-distant past? It is difficult to find in Plato’s works a specific answer to this question, isn’t it?

**P.M.** Precisely. For everyone, this line is placed somewhere differently. However, it is worth noting that Plato’s Socrates, pressed by his inquisitive interlocutors, at least makes an attempt to clear all doubts. Often, the vision of the ideal state is something we object to, as in the case of the postulate “that the best of either sex should be united with the best as often, and the inferior with the inferior, as seldom as possible; and that they should rear the offspring of the one sort of union, but not of the other, if the flock is to be maintained in first-rate condition” (Plato, 2008/2016, V, 459 d–e). That is Nazi’s eugenics in its pure form! Plato assures us about the existence of the perfect happiness in the community of women, children and property where no-one uses the word “mine”, which eliminates all conflicts. Contemporary people associate this vision with the nightmare of 20th-century totalitarian regimes. Perhaps this way Plato wished to warn people against implementing idealistic visions? Everyone would like to live in a just state, without poverty or social inequality. *The Republic* shows us what the costs of introducing the ideal may be, even based on the abstract assumption of the purity of intentions and the crystal fairness of all citizens.

**A.G.** It should be remembered, however, that all of Plato's recommendations regarding marriage, producing children and regulating births, i.e., those matters which we usually consider to be within the private sphere, result from the concept of the philosopher's ideal state. In his vision, an individual's happiness should be subordinated in every sphere of life to the good of the state. And, in turn, a stable, harmoniously ordered state results in the happiness of its citizens. For Plato, the number of inhabitants was a very important factor in the stability of the state, which is particularly emphasised in *The Laws*; hence, the rulers need to ensure that the community does not grow excessively and is created by the best possible individuals. We can be indignant about the regulation of births and leaving to the state the decisions regarding the upbringing of newborn children. Eugenics, however, was not invented by either Plato or by Nazi ideologues, but it existed in Sparta, where its citizens did not decide the fate of their offspring. Each citizen was obliged to show a newborn, probably only a male one, to the eldest members of his *phyle*, who decided the baby's life or death after inspecting him. When left unattended in a specially designed place near Mount Taygetus, the baby had no chance of survival (cf. Kulesza, 2009, pp. 125–127).

**R.M.** That is true. Only, one should not forget that the community of women and children proposed by Plato refers only to the ruling class and the guardians. Plato proposes the full regulation of marriages and births only in their case, and he goes even further by proposing that women be the common property of men and that their children also be shared so that “no parent is to know his own child, nor any child his parent” (Plato, 2008/2016, V, 457d). Why does Plato propose all this? In my opinion, his intention is similar to that of community property. Those who rule should not be distracted by issues related to household management, family or any kinds of pleasure. Many critics attempt to show Plato's “naivety” here but let us try to defend him.

In Book V of *The Republic*, he often indicates the need for equality between women and men. Such views are simply incredible two and a half thousand years before the inclusion of the fair gender opportunities in political life. Initially, the Broad-shouldered<sup>5</sup> provides a shocking comparison by writing:

[...] do they both share equally in hunting and in keeping watch and in the other duties of dogs? Or do we entrust to the males the entire and exclusive care of the flocks, while we leave the females at home, under the idea that the bearing and suckling their puppies is labour enough for them? (Plato, 2008/2016, V, 451d)

The philosopher wonders how much the nature of men and women differs. Is it possible to determine these differences in a precise manner, and should we assign a particular job for each sex? Plato realises that this is a rather controversial

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<sup>5</sup> This is how we could translate the nickname of Plato, which was supposedly attributed to him by his gymnastics teacher because of his broad shoulders. Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* provides two other explanations for giving the philosopher the name Plato, that is, the Broad One: he was thus named because of the diffuseness of his style or his broad forehead (III, 4–5). Plato's actual name was Aristokles (cf. Piątkowski, 2001, p. 24).

subject which, when discussed, often turns a debate into a quarrel. He writes then that there is a certain contradiction when analysing this problem. On the one hand, we can agree that the nature of a woman is different from that of a man, and thus all kinds of work performed should be related to this fact. On the other hand, nothing prevents different natures from doing the same thing. So what are the differences in the nature of a man and a woman except that the female sex gives birth and the male impregnates? Plato does not show them at all and simply states that in many activities one sex is inferior to the other, “many women are in many things superior to many men” (Plato, 2008/2016, V, 451d). Therefore, there are no natural obstacles to the participation of members of both sexes in state administration. However, to avoid absolute political correctness, Plato finally adds that “but the gifts of nature are alike diffused in both; all the pursuits of men are the pursuits of women also, but in all of them a woman is inferior to a man” (Plato, 2008/2016, V, 455d-e). This does not disqualify Plato; let us not forget the victory of the patriarchy in Greek culture over the initially strong matriarchy. In the Cretan religion, for example, the cult of goddesses and matriarchy dominated for a long time. Women-housewives played a dominant role, especially in the absence of men, who spent most of their lives sailing. In Plato’s time, those relations changed completely: it was Zeus who was the omnipotent master of the world (Kupis, 1989, pp. 46, 308).

**A.G.** As for matriarchy, in the work of Wipszycka and Bravo, we can read that (1988, p. 54):

Contemporary anthropology abandoned the theory of matriarchy as a stage in the history of primitive societies. [...] What is known about the situation in Crete is that women were often presented by artists, which may (but does not have to) reflect their role in the life of the palace, and which was certainly connected with the type of worship in which female deities played a significant role. Nota bene one can find in the ancient world other societies with the high position of women (Egypt, for example), but this does not mean that those societies were considered to be matriarchies.

**P.M.** Indeed, Plato showed great courage touching on the “feminine issue”. What is more, one can see in his argument the postulate of allowing women to be educated on an equal footing with men: “you will admit that the same education which makes a man a good guardian will make a woman a good guardian” (Plato, 2008/2016, V, 456c). Implementing this idea also took a long time.

**A.G.** I would add that not only can one see the postulate of women’s access to education and power in the state, but it is a postulate proposed by Plato’s Socrates, who states that a woman differs from a man in terms of nature, understood in the biological sense, therefore members of both sexes should be entrusted with the same tasks and functions in the state, because it is not sex that should influence the place of an individual in the state’s structure but his or her natural predispositions and abilities that need to be discovered and then developed in the process of education (Plato, 2008/2016, V, 453b–456b). According to Nicholas D. Smith (1998, Vol. III, pp. 197–198), in Plato’s opinion, men and women are psychologically

equal because every human being plays a role in society in accordance with his or her nature, and this nature is determined by the soul, or psyche, which has no sexual characteristics. So, if there is a woman with “the temper of the guardian” (Plato, 2008/2016, V, 456a), she should receive the same upbringing as a man intended for the role of guardian of the state; hence, a woman can enter the social elite on an equal footing with men. It should only be remembered that she is physically weaker than men. This is a revolution, considering that in Athens at that time women did not have civil rights or legal personality, so they had to be under the care of a male family representative, and their education was modest and limited to activities preparing them to run the household, that is, learning to cook, spin, and weave, as well as acquiring the basics of reading, calculation and music, the knowledge of which was passed to girls by their mothers, grandmothers and nannies (Flacelière, 1985, p. 56). Even women belonging to the Athenian social elite led their lives in the privacy of their homes, away from the affairs of the men that belonged to their immediate family (cf. Annas, 1981, pp. 181–182). And according to Plato, women can even serve in the army and deal with philosophy, that is, the spheres reserved exclusively for men. Interestingly, another Athenian author came up with the idea of putting the reins of government into the hands of women, namely the playwright Aristophanes in *The Assemblywomen* performed in Athens in 392 BC. When women take power in the state, they also abolish private property, introduce communal meals and sexual freedom. It is difficult not to find certain similarities with the concept of the ideal Platonic state, and these similarities are probably not accidental, but as stated by Jerzy Łanowski: “[...] here arises one of the most difficult interpretation problems still troubling researchers of Greek thought and literature” (Aristofanes, 1981, p. LXII). The comparison of people to pure-bred dogs can cause outrage today, but it is not unusual. First of all, in Plato’s dialogues, Socrates often refers to various examples taken from life to make his reasoning clearer. In addition, comparisons to horses or dogs seem understandable, considering that hunting was one of the favourite pursuits of the aristocracy at the time, to which, after all, the author of dialogue belongs along with Socrates’ interlocutors in *The Republic*—Adeimantus and Glaucon, Plato’s brothers.

**P.M.** Through Socrates, Plato also puts forward other controversial theses apart from women’s equality. One such thesis shows the harmfulness of excessive enrichment. Although many people say that it is more important to “be” than “to have”, the general opinion has not changed since the time of Plato. It is true that a man who is wise “will not allow himself to be dazzled by the foolish applause of the world, and heap up riches to his own infinite harm” (Plato, 2008/2016, IX, 591d), but such social pressure exists to this day. Plato himself often regretted that philosophers usually lived in poverty, enduring human contempt, without experiencing respect for the attributes of reason. The positive role of financial motivation in the economic development of the state is not taken into account here. The spiritual and mental development of man is the most important so that “no disorder occur [...] such as might arise either from superfluity or from want” (Plato, 2008/2016, IX, 591e).

**R.M.** True. For Plato, ideal goods are superior to real goods. This is evident not only in his theory of the state, but also in the doctrine of virtues and love. His concept of ethics also assumed a hierarchy of goods. Real goods are only the beginning and an inevitable stage on the road to the very top. At this top, there are no real goods, only ideal goods—as Tatarkiewicz says—the idea of Good. He writes that the sine qua non condition of achieving ideal, absolute and eternal goals is to go through real, relative, finite and temporal goals. He believes that the meaning of the Platonic theory of love is based on this concept (1978, p. 99).

However, I would not shy away so quickly from issues related to management. The Platonic vision of these issues seems to be made more real when he presents the picture of the so-called “second-order state”<sup>6</sup>—a transitory state on the road to the ideal. The division of land in the delimited area was also to be hierarchical. Although every settler was to receive a piece of land, and with it, additional resources necessary for its cultivation and existence, the size of the plot would depend on belonging to a particular property class. In this way, Plato decided a priori who was supposed to be equal and who would be more equal by introducing the concept of relative equality.<sup>7</sup>

The “second-order” state is also characterised by the fact that the use of usury or profit is prohibited in it. Citizens should be satisfied with what is harvested. The country as a whole should also be economically self-sufficient. Plato states directly “let there be no retail trade for the sake of money-making, either in these or any other articles, in the city or country at all” (Platon, 2008/2013a, VIII, 847d–e). This does not mean that any exchange should disappear completely. Trade was permissible when it was equivalent in nature, i.e., you could get the equivalent of a product in the form of another product. In addition, the state can import such “plant or metal objects” whose production is not possible under the given conditions.

**A.G.** However, it should be emphasised that *The Laws* you are referring to now do not constitute a continuation of *The Republic*. The circumstances in which the conversation in *The Laws* is held, and its purpose, are different to *The Republic*. In *The Laws*, the three interlocutors strive to create the best possible set of laws for the emerging colony on Crete, while in *The Republic* the participants of the dialogue, seeking the answer to the question of what justice is, create a paradigm of the ideal polis.

**R.M.** It is true, but it is impossible to not refer to them, because it is in *The Laws* that we find a there be no retail trade for the sake of money-making number of solutions for specific issues that were of no interest for the interlocutors in *The Republic*. Returning to these economic issues, Plato goes even further in his criticism when he discusses the issue of interest. He literally abhors usury. He writes about those who “insert their sting—that is their money—into someone else [the person taking a loan – R.M.], and recover the parent sum many times over multi-

<sup>6</sup> This term is encountered in Plato's *The Laws*.

<sup>7</sup> The range of property ownership was as follows: the highest class was entitled to four times the value of the plot, the second class to three times, the next class to two times and the last class to one. Assuming that the value of all plots was the same (Platon, 2008/2013a, V, 744d–744e). More on the subject in Piątkowski (2001, pp. 32–36).

plied [...] and so they make drone and pauper to abound in the State” (Plato, 2008/2016, VIII, 555e). Therefore, citizens should be forced to be honest, and then there would be “less of this scandalous money-making” (Plato, 2008/2016, VIII, 555e–556a). It should not be forgotten that this attitude towards usury was not something extraordinary in antiquity. Aristotle—Plato’s pupil—will make equally strong criticism of the use of interest, and we will have to wait until the late Middle Ages for this practice to become customary. Saint Thomas made it happen in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (more on the subject in Piątkowski, 2002, pp. 33–38).

Plato most resents the fact that moneylenders do not really do anything, so firstly they are not useful for the state, and secondly, they harm their own souls through laziness. A rich man who squanders his estate with no benefit is compared to a poor man who wanders around without any money. Such a situation seems to be unacceptable to Plato—in his opinion, every citizen should perform a function in the state. In Plato’s ideal state there would not be any unemployment. Let us go back, however, to our rich wastrel. What makes Plato particularly angry is when such a wastrel is the ruler. Plato argues that such an individual is unfit to exercise power because he is more absorbed by money and his own pleasures than serving the state. Not to mention the fact that he can evade taxes, which Plato also strongly condemns.<sup>8</sup> The philosopher also disapproves of democratic rule, where power is taken over by rebellious paupers—he accuses them of incompetence and lacking discipline (Plato, 2008/2016, VIII, 552b).

Respect for the law was very important for Plato, and he did not show any leniency for people acting to the detriment of the state. He spoke with great emphasis, as mentioned before, about the need to pay taxes. He claimed that the property of every citizen should be carefully estimated so that the state would lose nothing of its income. He was also extremely severe towards state officials whose conduct was not guided by selfless work for their homeland: “The safest course is to obey the law which says, ‘Do no service for a bribe’, and let him who disobeys, if he be convicted, simply die” (Plato, 2008/2013a, XII, 955d).

One may wonder if Platonic radicalism and its consequences for people who live in his imaginary state can be called morally right. Kołakowski points to the fact that “saying that something is good does not necessarily mean that the act that leads to its realisation is morally right” (1997, p. 21). Plato’s many statements—among other things, the statement that out of all regimes he prefers a dictatorship (2008/2016, VIII, 562a)—show that he is ready to sacrifice the freedom and personal aspirations of people for the highest goal—the creation of a perfectly organised state.

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<sup>8</sup> I wonder how Plato would judge the Muslim contestation of tax systems. Let us emphasise here that the submission to the will of God is one of features of Islam, along with the intolerance of usury—the basic element of a modern market economy. However, according to Alan Beattie, warnings against the use of interest in the *Quran* are not as strong as in the *Old Testament*, and Muslims are able to bypass the restrictive rules by applying the term of special tax or penalty for late payment. Cf. Matera & Matera, 2011, p. 64.

**A.G.** Speaking of Plato's appreciation for a dictatorship, you probably mean Socrates' statement that "there remains still the finest and fairest of all men and all States—tyranny and the tyrant" (2008/2016, VIII, 562a). It must be remembered, however, that in the quoted words of Socrates, the tone is ironic. For tyranny is discussed as the last, and thus the worst, political and social system in the Platonic conception of systemic transformation according to which better regimes gradually become worse forms of government. Plato cannot appreciate a tyrant too much, since in *Phaedrus* (2008/2013b) we read that the tyrant occupies the last, ninth place in the order of soul incarnations. So, there is no worse type of man.

**R.M.** Even if Plato does not think about introducing tyranny in his ideal polis, let us just consider who would want to work in a state that does not care about the happiness of the individual. It would be necessary to change human nature first in order to undertake such an experiment. I do not see any chance of the Platonic project being accepted by the class of farmers, merchants or craftsmen, not to mention philosophers and soldiers. Of course, one should not reject such a model of the ideal state outright, but the possibility of its implementation should be properly considered. Plato is justified by the fact that during his time, and even many years later, the implementation of such an experiment did not succeed and there was no knowledge of its consequences. Let us hope that the 20<sup>th</sup> century permanently dealt with all kinds of ideas related to the creation of a similar—albeit heavily distorted and twisted—system.

In X, the last and extremely suggestive Book of *The Republic*, Plato tries to answer the question of what determines the life of man on Earth. And to be honest, I was a bit surprised by his conclusions. While reading his works, we repeatedly encounter fragments about the need to be active in public life and the necessity to use one's intellectual abilities. And here, in the last part, Plato shows us the example of wise Odysseus, who rejects ambition and a political career to lead a quiet, private life, providing a chance for intelligent work. Władysław Witwicki, the Polish translator of *The Republic*, writes in his comments that Plato had to console himself with such an image (Plato, 2003, p. 336, footnote 16). Or perhaps he treats the words of the prophet which the philosopher quotes as an example of determinism in this world and this life. He put the following words in the mouth of the being from the beyond:

Even for the last comer, if he chooses wisely and will live diligently, there is appointed a happy and not undesirable existence. Let not him who chooses first be careless, and let not the last despair. (Plato, 2008/2016, X, 619b)

Our choices can be fraught with consequences. By choosing recklessly, we succumb to various types of temptations, including greed and excessive ambition, and thus we must suffer during our lifetime. By preferring a virtuous life, we can achieve order and harmony of the soul. For this, however, we need four virtues: wisdom, courage, self-control, and finally justice (Tatarkiewicz, 1978, p. 98).

The same qualities can be found in Plato's ideal state. According to him, it must be wise, courageous, prudent and just. A wise state is one founded in accordance with nature, in which rulers can deal with politics using knowledge. A wise state is identified with wise rule. A courageous state must be based on good military structures and the conviction that terrible is only what is written in law as terrible and nothing else. A prudent state is one in which citizens make their temptations subordinate to reason, and more broadly, in which the working and producing social classes submit to the "intellectual care" of the ruling classes (Plato, 2008/2016, IV, 428e–431b). About the last virtue—justice, Plato writes probably the most on the pages of *The Republic* and I wonder if we should not finish our reflections by considering this very issue.

**P.M.** After all, it is the attempt to determine what justice is and the question whether it is worth having this virtue which gave rise, as already mentioned, to such extensive deliberations over the issues related to the organisation of the ideal state! What is just in the life of society? Let us repeat: Plato described it very succinctly as "doing your own thing". So we are back to the division of labour again: "in the case of the citizens generally, each individual should be put to the use for which nature intended him" (Plato, 2008/2016, IV, 433a). And he does not only mean that everyone should find a profession that brings joy to this person and benefits to others. The greatest danger for the state is when an unfit person takes over its rule. This is the manner in which Plato understood this particular issue. In conclusion, a just state is one in which everyone knows their place: a person does not aspire to public office, if he is, for example, a good shoemaker, and at the same time, a person does not shy away from it when he is predisposed for such an office.

One can say that Plato's views on the state do not raise any doubts. Everyone has an idea of a state encoded somewhere inside, and Plato's vision has many features of such an organism. However, not everyone appreciates stability and life programmed from birth to death. It is not so easy to define one's talents unambiguously. Would it therefore be necessary to create a special institution that would infallibly establish the social function of every person and would stop the over-ambitious from taking the wrong path? Plato did not resolve this issue. What can be done with the natural desire of man to climb the social ladder? After all, it is not always associated with unfair competition or an embarrassing lack of competence. It is certainly better when everyone can make an unhampered choice, which is then verified by the free market.

**A.G.** Plato, however, presented a certain systemic solution, namely, he created a system for educating future guardians and philosophers. At each stage of education, the students are assessed and screened. Only the best are able to pass to the next level of education. And the criteria set for the future ruling elites are extremely high, both physically, ethically and intellectually:

and the preference again given to the surest and the bravest, and, if possible, to the fairest; and, having noble and generous tempers, they should also have the natural gifts which will facilitate their education [...]. Such gifts as keenness and

ready powers of acquisition [...] for the mind more often faints from the severity of study than from the severity of gymnastics: the toil is more entirely the mind's own, and is not shared with the body. [...] Further, he of whom we are in search should have a good memory, and be an unwearied solid man who is a lover of labour in any line; or he will never be able to endure the great amount of bodily exercise and to go through all the intellectual discipline and study which we require of him. (Plato, 2008/2016, VII, 535a–c )

Putting philosophers, that is, the best people, at the helm of the state should ensure its stability and harmony because the good of the state has its source in the soul of its founder or ruler, placing the stamp of his soul on the institutions, as Voegelin (2009, p. 144) vividly described the process of the nature of the ruling permeating the nature of the state. This does not, however, ensure the state's durability and everlastingness because everything that has been created experiences periods of fertility and infertility, and must finally pass. In the ideal state, an error in calculating the proper fertility period of its citizens marks the beginning of the process of its destruction. It is enough when worse children are born, which will lead to a gradual decay of the ruling elite, and eventually result in the fall of the state.

**R.M.** At the end of our lively conversation, it should be emphasised that one cannot, of course, be indignant at Plato for his vision of the ideal state. He probably did not intend to put it into practice. *The Republic* gives the impression of intellectual play at the highest level. Plato truly valued dialectics, understood as the art of conducting discussions and gradually arriving at the truth by discovering and overcoming contradictions in the interlocutor's way of thinking. Plato himself had no answers, however theoretical, to all the questions. That is why he hides in this dialogue in the form of his great teacher—Socrates, propping himself up with his authority, or disguising himself behind the mask of humour and irony, letting us know that he does not always honestly express his true, deeply thought-out considerations.

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