

THE 13th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF



ISSEI

International Society for the Study of European Ideas
in cooperation with the University of Cyprus



UTOPIAN OR CONTEMPORARY RULERS

Dr. Klitos Ioannides

Nicosia

As early as the 3rd century B.C., Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, who was born in Citium in Cyprus, demanded that man function, move and exist as a citizen of the world - a cosmopolitan. And not only as a citizen of the planet earth, but of the universe as a whole. This was in total accordance with the basic tenet of the stoic School - "to live in accordance with Nature" - an avowal in harmony with the rhythm and direction of the universal nature of the whole, of which man is an integral and con-substantial molecule and cell.

Ephesian philosopher Heraclitus, preached the «ξυνός λόγος» that is the universal word, which in contrast with the private word, does not trade in the requirements of the global word. And Athenian teacher, Socrates, in his quest for truth, sought *definitions* and universals, as delivered to us by Aristotle. Without the universal, it is not possible to secure the validity of a value or principle of universal power. Plato too, in *Timaeus*, demands that we have knowledge of our ancient nature which is in harmony with "the direction and movement of the universe" if man is to move from destruction and the level of the senses to immortality and the permanence of eternity, of which time is the moving image. While Anaxagoras of Klazomenes in Asia Minor, teacher to Socrates and Pericles, sees the mind in its cosmic dimension (the mind which orders all), contemporary thinkers such as Habermas move towards the universal, or, in the case of Apel, to the transcendental, without ignoring the universal.

The recollection of these conquests by the human spirit also accords with the commandments of the Gospel, in Revelation. Christ asks that the Gospel be spread "throughout the world", that peoples be "as one", and the disciples travel all over the world "teaching all nations".

Familiarisation with the world and the universal has been a requirement and an enigma since antiquity, in man's quest to know the truth of himself and the

meaning of creation. It has been a pre-condition of self-knowledge and at the same time a necessary step in the struggle of the ascetic path towards knowledge of God.

The type of literature which makes high demands, which is of a philosophical, existential and - why not - religious content, has always been the conscience of life, an exorcist and healing sun, and has lived and loved alongside all the other disciplines of the universal nature of man, while at the same time acting as a catapult in all cases of deceit or attempts to obscure and distort what is true, just, beautiful and good, and all exemplary models of values and moral principles of universal power and reference. That is why, when in our times, it denounces all forms of alienation, nausea, injustice, corruption, criminality, pride, dramatization of the ego, or ugliness, it is essentially clearing the landscape of the mist and fog which cover it, in order to let the light shine through, and in that light, see the light.

Unless the globalization' sought by the powerful and heroic spirits of humanity, through their thoughts and words, is accompanied by man's spiritual and moral growth, the infected and infectious world of dissipation and deconstructionism will turn human beings - the citizens of the global village - to irresolute sheep, tossed hither and thither like consumer and tourist machines on the jaws of monetary and capitalist profit.

Dostoevsky said that only Beauty can save the world. That is true. But beauty is not only aesthetic, it is also moral and political; it belongs to the cosmos and the soul. It's essence depends to a great extent on holiness and divine grace. And the universalisation of the modern world, which cannot leave literary and artistic expression indifferent, moves beyond post-modern happenings, towards the essence, in order to encounter the small, but at the same time, large world, through miracles and wonder, through ecstasy and divine transport. "This world, so small, so great", as the Nobel-winning modern Greek poet Odysseas Elytis tell us.

No longer an alien world, but a familiar one, no longer unfair but fair, no longer an inarticulate world, but an articulate one, no longer the world of the barbarity of prehistoric demonic dinosaurs, but a world of civilization and of angels. The planet is Paradise. And thought exorcises and heals the wounds of the hell of humanity, and carries the wounded and the damned towards the joys and warmth of Heaven. This is its role in the painful process of universalisation, which should be accompanied "by prudence and dream" to quote Dionysios Solomos, the national poet of the Greeks. But it should also be accompanied by the bread of life, by manna from heaven, which refreshes the tired travelers in the desert of the mystic Sina.

"Stand we firm", said the Archangel Michael, as Lucifer and the battalion of the damned fell from the first angelic order to the depths of darkness.

The archangel's cry of "stand we firm" was taken up by writers all over the world, in order that the human race keep its hearts raised high and not fall into cannibalism and zoology, from which unfortunately it suffers, as a result of its sick and selfish ego.

The great Athenian historian Thucydides, described his history of the Peloponnesian War as possession for even, knowing as he did that the nature of man, with the beast within, would forever be at odds with moral law. This, alas, is true at all times and in all places. This is the raw truth, but Utopias do exist. Such Utopias are described by poets and writers, sometimes allopathically and sometimes homeopathically - as they become both doctors and healers, in a world where people feel like aliens, strangers and outsiders.

The healing power of the word and its illumination, is anxiously sought by the weary contemporary humanity of nausea and of nihilism, of death and despair, horror and possession, lust and glamour, so that there can once more prevail in our world conditions of beauty, holiness, purity of heart, meekness, serenity, and inner and outer creativity.

Like children of Paradise, writers sing with the birds of paradise, prepared to accept the hemlock of the world, the poison arrows of the merciless masters of darkness, never forgetting that the shining wings of the Cherubim were born of poison and the blows of the ignorance of prehistoric - through historic - man.

Servants and deacons of men and of the Truth, through their work thinkers and writers bear witness to the suffering of the world and the human race, while at the same time sending out messages of light to a world which must be led to archetypal beauty and divine perfection.

The great sophist Gorgias, ended his oration at Olympia by wishing for courage and the deciphering of enigmas. It is through the straits of enigmas that the Argo of thought sails, and, like the Argonauts, creators are ever traveling towards the Golden Fleece which is guarded by dragons. Keeping a tight hold on the thread of Ariadne, they enter the labyrinth of the world in order to kill the Minotaur in each of us.

Ithaca awaits. Like Ulysses, creators march towards an ever-moving destination. The journey, the Odyssey, albeit with the terrible Sirens, remains the most worthy of all adventures. With Athena, Goddess of wisdom as their guide, thinkers and creators move towards the Ithaca of the universal - material and spiritual - as long as they can overcome the rage of Poseidon, God of the sea. They can achieve this by respecting differences, which are the quintessence of democracy. Unity in diversity, on the basis of the principle that the whole works for the part and the part for the whole. Meanwhile, the divine Shepherds do not yet come to vindicate nations and peoples, and, through wise, universal and just administration, to put an end to the sufferings, anguish and heartache of humanity.

If it is true that the philosopher alone has the power to contemplate and reach the world of Truth, then it is also true that he has the capability of acting with full consciousness of his actions. A testimony to his knowledge is the fact that he is able to reorganize the perceived, diffuse, confused and multifaceted world, and

turn it, in accordance with the requirements of the higher examples, to spiritual unity. In contrast with the sophists who remain in the service of a fragmentary and divided non-being, constantly in motion, the philosopher stands as the genuine representative of the one and unmoving being. Having achieved mental unity, he is able to fertilise and adapt perceived and tangible multiplicity. In this way he becomes a creator shaping formless matter, with universal ideas, mathematics and geometry as his media.

His word is equivalent to the omnipotent and eternal law which fights against transitory opinion (δόξα).

However, we must look at this philosophical venture and examine it through the programme of the ruler - philosopher, who having set as his aim the perfecting of the philosophical work, will undertake many functions, and at the same time become legislator, statesman, pedagogue, art critic, priest of his own cult, etc.

Plato's pedagogic theory cannot be separated from his philosophical system as a whole. Platonic education is the reflection of the Athenian philosopher's theory of the world. However, we are able to distinguish its various phases, according to a guiding pattern which leads to the top of the pyramid, to "Good" (Ἀγαθόν) as the supreme authority in a dialectic ascent leading to the irrefutable principle of "Good" as the transcension of matter. This upward movement also leads to a dialectic descent, to the organisation of the physical world. Indeed, after a great deal of effort the philosopher arrives at the imagined place where the sun of the being radiates eternally. From there the philosopher - now a true initiate, descends once more unwillingly to earth, among men, to organize their world, according to eternal models and ideas. This is at the very least the meaning of the great myth of the Cave in the *Republic*⁽¹⁾.

The pedagogical ideal of the founder of the Academy, far from remaining pure theory, requires his self-realisation on both the individual and the collective level. In order to make this programme a reality, the *Republic* will be called upon to play a fundamental role. It will become the guardian of the

philosophical mission, with the prime aim of providing an education appropriate to the individual and the whole.

Such a view on education requires suitable reforms, capable of harmonizing individual behaviours with civil laws.

The inter-dependence of the individual and the state will of necessity give to Platonic teaching the character of directed education. Thus deontology, as well as the supreme aim, the necessary means and the method for each educational cycle, will be fixed in advanced⁽²⁾. However, before examining the various cycles, it is necessary to underline the following. In the *Republic* education is given only to the few, the elite who are especially gifted in mathematics and dialectics. In the *Laws*, Plato realizes that man's nature is shaped very early, in childhood, and he then undertakes to educate the "hoi polloi", that is the people. These two pedagogical phases - that of the governor philosopher, and that of the governed - cover the two levels of education formulated by the head of the Academy: a) pre-education and (b) higher mathematical and philosophical studies and dialectics.

The Platonic philosopher remains loyal to pure and untainted thought, and to philosophical research without ever accepting any kind of trade in the ideas and mysteries he has received. The philosopher remains the eternal custodian, extoller and 'preacher of the world. His love and words are like a birth in the ocean of Beauty and Dionysiac ecstasy. That is why involvement in philosophy is a secret initiation and catharsis. All the philosopher's soul does is to "follow God" as the *Laws*⁽³⁾ tell us, and as *Theaetetus* tell us earlier "in the image of God". This, indeed, was the work of Plato's Academy: unceasing involvement in the life of reflection (θεωρητικός βίος).

In *Corgias*, Socrates, having praised cosmic order and geometric equality, invites Callicles to combine theoretical and political life, on condition that deep reflection on the essence of things, on ideas and numbers will accompany political action⁽⁴⁾. However, in order to be closer to the Platonic spirit, with

regard to the public life of the philosopher, we must look at what the *Laws* says. In a passage in the *Laws* Plato says that human affairs must be seriously cared for, even though we have no choice in the matter: unfortunately this is our destiny. The passage goes on - as does Book One of the *Laws* - to talk about man being a plaything in the hands of the Gods⁽⁵⁾. That which is of interest and worthy of all' study and concern is Good himself. This is the best plaything with which man can concern himself throughout his life. Does this attitude indicate Plato's fatigue late in life, after Socrates has drunk the hemlock, and following his bitter experiences in the Court of Dionysius? We think not. It is in keeping with Plato's view of the world, without the Athenian philosopher forgetting his political obligations, in spite of the fact that in the *Republic* he adds that he who is spiritually bound to higher beings has not interest in looking down to human affairs⁽⁶⁾. It is essential for the philosopher - spectator with superior ideals and a sense of justice to return to the conflicts and injustices of men. Those who have seen the divine sights of the world of the mind, find it difficult to return to human wretchedness. Their souls to be always raised high. Why then should they descend once more, only to be met with poverty and misery⁽⁷⁾.

In the Platonic city, happiness must never be individual, but always a collective affair. Between individuals and classes there is mutual dependence and coherence. Individual happiness finds its justification only through the happiness of the whole, and vice versa. There is in fact incontrovertible unity between the city and the individual. Thus, the philosopher, the supreme expression of unity and the city, personifies the identification of politics and philosophy as the prevailing idea of this human hive⁽⁸⁾.

The philosophers of Callipolis, each in his turn, must descend from the place of the mind to ordinary life, and become accustomed once again to the dark pictures of the life of the senses. Their task is to reconstruct political life in accordance with the examples of what is Beautiful, Good and Just, and build a real city instead of remaining in the city of dreams. This city must necessarily be the best, as it will be governed by people without selfish desires. In contrast,

other cities are not well governed, as the statesmen suffer from excessive ambition and the wish to become leaders. In this way, the philosopher's political undertaking is no more than the fulfillment of this duty to justice. His wealth in virtue and wisdom brings him to the position of the ultimate ruler⁽⁹⁾.

The philosopher's political activity thus springs from dialectical necessity which corresponds to the position of the initiate to Truth and Justice. The proposals of Book VII of the *Republic* which assign to the dialectician - philosopher the mission of redeeming the city, do not express, on the level of action, anything other than the descending dialectic phase on the theoretical plane. As we saw earlier, what is involved is the salutary and philosophical work, undertaken in their fifties by those who are able to communicate and see the light of Good, with the common good as their sole incentive. They are the saints and heroes of divinity experienced as a part of human and sociopolitical life: these are the philosophers of Callipolis or the republic of the Laws⁽¹⁰⁾. The philosopher-kings or philosopher-rulers, who are man's only hope of salvation, are the incarnation of the Kingdom of truth on earth. This is what Plato attempted to achieve in the court of the tyrant of Syracuse, by transforming the tyrant into a philosopher. As we know, he failed; but he left the road open to us. And in the *Seventh Letter*, which is in many aspects biographical, he insists that salvation will come only when the race of pure and genuine philosophers takes over public government, or when by divine grace or fate, the rulers begin to become true philosophers.

Although Plato does not shift from his proposals, he is aware of human weakness. He does not expect his ideal to be fully realized, even if philosophers do take over government. He always adds to his exhortations the phrase "as far as 'possible'". In the *Republic* he tells us that the Model is always in heaven, for all who have eyes to see it. It is to that ideal that the eyes of the true philosopher are always turned.

The city of the *Republic* is a purely philosophical city, or model-city, rather than a scene for a political constitution. There Plato looks at things from the angle of eternity. The point is the purchase of time from eternity, a fact which gives precise meaning to the philosophical act. The philosopher's action are not limited to the boundaries of the temporal, but go on beyond known- human limits. That which interests our philosopher is time without end, to enable the soul to devote itself to matters which require much more time than that provided by human life from the cradle to the grave⁽¹³⁾.

This is confirmed by Socrates' words in Book V of the *Republic* where the sage recognizes that all his actions were performed "in order to set an example" and for justice, eternal ideals to be emulated and to provide a fixed point of reference.

However, those who have not been able to find a model in their souls to which they can refer at all time, are considered blind. The city of *Laws* is nothing else than a faithful imitation and reconstruction for practical purposes, of the eternal ideal given by the *Republic* and intended for the Gods and the children of Gods⁽¹⁴⁾. Plato is fully aware that the task of the Legislator - Philosopher of the *Laws* is a second class activity, as its aim is to adapt the absolute and divine to the relative and human. God is the sole perfect legislator, as he creates and works from nature and the very essence of things⁽¹⁵⁾.

There are three types of constitution for Plato: The divine, that of the philosopher-legislator, and that of the pale imitation of government by the philosopher. As for the ordinary legislator he has never dealt with thoughts of this kind. However, the theory of knowledge is essentially behind all philosophical activity. This indicates that the *Republic* is on the side of the divine legislator, while the *Laws* uses as its model the Legislator-philosopher.

The city described in the *Republic* is the divine city, the political work of the philosopher, performed in the same way as the creator of *Timaeus* performs his task on the level of Cosmology⁽¹⁶⁾. By making the world of the *Republic* divine, the philosopher-creator saves the physical world, since God descends to the physical in the image of the intelligible God⁽¹⁷⁾. In contrast, the first of the *Laws*, an expression of Reason and the Divine, has meaning only for the members of the Night Council, the dialecticians. The aim of the Athenian in the *Laws*, however, is to create the image of the eternal Example, the only one able to adapt and save human life, in whatever spheres it is moving. Man's salvation lies in his constant reference to the prime legislator who is none other than God, the *Laws* continually seeks the first Legislator, since Plato is deeply convinced that only a turn and adjustment to the cause can provide salvation. Man must legislate, as Zeus did through Minos in Crete, or as Apollo did by giving the laws of Lacedemon through Lycurgus. In Plato, all legislation is done with the authority of sanctity and the prophecies of the Oracles. However, a perception of this kind requires a clarification of the very idea of God, and this Plato does not fail to do in the *Republic*, the *Statesman* and the *Laws*⁽¹⁸⁾.

Platonic thought is deeply theocentric, in contrast with the anthropocentrism of the Sophists, particularly Protagoras. For Plato, the measure of all things is God and not man. A god, whose intermediary is the philosopher, that "demon", as Diotima would call it when speaking of philosophical love. This in any case, is the role of Socrates in the *Symposium*. Even if the philosopher plays many parts (legislator, pedagogue, artist, politician, etc.), this is always done in the name of a divine mission, until matter is finally overcome and humanity finds the cosmic cycle of Saturn one more, or the city of Justice, in *Critias's* Atlantis⁽¹⁹⁾. In the meantime, only the cities of the philosophers, guided by the divine shepherds are capable of guaranteeing the redemption and salvation of man, since they are based on laws stemming directly from God.

The above directions lay the foundation for the political morality and ethics of the Platonic city. The political philosophy of the Athenian has a religious

character and nature. In the *Laws*, Plato introduces divine intervention to city life, as was the case in the reign of Saturn, where the divine demons gave to men the political virtues, such as Economy.

Is constant divine intervention a sign of theocracy? As far as the *Laws* is concerned, we believe so. Before undertaking any other function, the philosopher of the *Laws* appears first of all as a "theo-logian"⁽²⁰⁾.

What is foremost in the Platonic political structure, however, is the central form of the Philosopher. Being the centre, where aesthetic multiplicity is united, and imagined/perceived unit is analysed, this divine shepherd undertakes the role of the liberator. From looking upon the substance, he moves on to defining existence. Using only the power of mathematical analogy (Δεσμῶν κάλλιστος αναλογία)⁽²¹⁾ he is able to remain in the imagined world and keep working in the complicated physical world, thus creating a "marriage" between philosophy and politics, theory and practice.

The one (i.e. Philosophy and politics) has no reason to exist without the other. According to Plato, we cannot philosophize without involving ourselves with political action. And politics, in Plato's terminology, is simply applied philosophy, just as the Republic is nurse and mother to men⁽²²⁾.

These thoughts and concerns of the ancient Athenian teacher clearly and relentlessly pose the question of today's ruler, and of every ruler after Plato. Our politicians - even those with knowledge of philosophy - unfortunately become drawn into the whirlpool of the sociopolitical systems and subjugate themselves to unholy expediencies and class interests.

We do not require from our politicians that they should be worthy. We require consistency, moral principles, as expressed in their magniloquent declarations. Unfortunately we are far from the heavenly Platonic scheme of things. The problem is consistently serious and consistently topical. If the truth is not demanded by the people and their leaders, if justice, beauty, harmony, the democratic conscience and eternal ideas and examples do not prevail, the

world will always wander in deception, injustice, lack of order and mutual destruction. It seems that man's dinosaurs / like brain and all the prehistory it carries with it cannot be transformed in just a few decades.

Plato, the political philosopher throws down the gauntlet and challenges us. If we want to be saved we are bound to raise ourselves to such heights as to enable us, by making the appropriate mental adjustments, to shape individuals and societies.

The same is true for those who obey the Gospels and all who passionately seek to follow the path of Christ and the Sermon on the Mount. Hemlock and the Cross await all who have decided to sacrifice themselves for humanity, becoming Martyrs and ministers of the Eternal and the True.

NOTES

1. *Republic*, 514 a sq.
2. H.I. MARROU, *Histoire de l' Education dans l'Antiquité*, Paris, 1965, pp. 116- 117.

R.L. NETTLESHIP, *The Theory of Education in Plato's Republic*, Oxford, 1935, pp. 32-48. R.L. LODGE, *Plato's theory of Education*, London, 1947, E.B. CASTLE, *Ancient Education and today*, London, 1967, p.69 sq. E.M. GRUBE, *Plato's thought*, chap. Education.
3. *Laws*, 71 cb, A.J. FESTUGIERE, *Etudes de Philosophie grecque*, Paris, 1971, pp. 245-247, 155, 117-137.
4. *Gorgias*, 527 d.
5. *Laws*, 803 b-c.
6. *Republic*, 500 59.
7. Ibid, 517 c-d, 519d.
8. Ibid, 519c-520a, *Laws*, 739 b-e. M. VANHOUTTE, *La philosophie politique de Platon dans les Lois*, Louvain, 1954, pp. 188-190.
9. *Republic*, 520b-521b.
10. Ibid, 540 ab.
11. Ibid, 473c-e, *Letter VII*, 326a-b.
12. *Theaetetus*, 176c, *Republic*, 592 b.
13. *Statesman*, 608c.
14. *Laws*, 739, e.c.f. *Republic*, 472c-473a, 484c-d.
15. *Laws*, 807 1,875d. Ibid, 500 c-d, *Republic*, 500c-501 c.
16. *Timaeus*, 92c.

17. V. GOLDSCHMIDT, *Le Paradigme dans la Dialectique Platonicienne*, Paris, 1947, pp. 96-105. M. VANHOUTTE, *La philosophie politique..... op.cit.*, pp. 213-216.
18. *Laws*, 630, c-e, 713a-e, *Republic*, 378e-383c, 590 d-e.
19. *Laws*, 713 a-e, *Critias*.
20. *Laws*, 803 b-c.
21. *Timaeus*, 86c.
22. *Menexenus*, 288 c.P. LACHIEZE-REY, *Les idées morales, sociales et politiques de Platon*, Paris, 1951, p. 185 sq. T.A.SINGLAIR, *Histoire de la pensée politique grecque*, Paris, 1953, p. 124 sq. J. LUCCIONI, *La pensée politique de Platon*, Paris, 1958, pp. 183-187sq.