

COMMENT ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE ANCIENT CITY. PLATO

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Abstract:

The article proposes to present the administrative organization imagined by Plato in the two dialogues of The Republic and The Laws. These fundamental works for Plato's sociological conception have been achieved in a particular socio-political context: the abolition of the Athenian democracy and the consolidation of tyranny. This is why Plato leaves Athens and imagines another city where the principle of justice will determine the Good for all citizens. The two papers ponder on the administrative-territorial organization, analyzing mainly an ideal type of citizen and justice. The style is metaphorical and the main ideas aim at education, justice, social structure and the practical activities that are legally regulated. The main idea, found in both dialogues, is that of the public Good, alongside four moral virtues: wisdom, temperance, justice, and moderation. The laws contain important ideas from the constitutional, civil and criminal law. We add to these the entire social organization in the Republic as a reminder that the ancient world represented the model of the modern world.

Keywords: *administrative organization, the principle of justice, the rule of law, the moral good.*

Preamble

Finding an optimal form of organizing social life, directed towards the realization of the public good, was a dominant feature of classical ancient Greece. The political events of the years 411 BC and 405 BC will generate a major interest in returning to a democratic regime. The year 411 BC marks the coup d'etat given to the Athenian democracy by an oligarchic regime that abolishes public positions, the constitutional order, and makes it possible to generate another political regime in 405 BC, the one of tyrants in the number of 30 people. A new constitution is established and new magistrates are appointed by the new leadership. There is a council of the 500, with absolute powers, accompanied by a whip guard.

Against the background of these socio-political transformations, there is a violent confrontation between the moderate and tyrannical forces that will result in a democratic government that will adopt a new constitution. In this political dispute Socrates and his student Critias, two major characters in Plato's dialogues, will find their end. Impressed by the death of Socrates, Plato will withdraw from Athens and develop two social

dialogues, *The Republic* and *The Laws*, dedicated to an ideal form of city. The state imagined represents the model of an ideal man, which is why it must be an educational tool for the citizens. Structuring the human being will constitute the source of inspiration for the administrative and social structure of the life in the city-state. Politics and morality will form a common body, and laws will regulate all forms of practical and political activity.

The ideal city – expression of the ideal human being

The Republic is the work through which Plato desires to assess the functioning of the ancient state organization of his time and proposes another way of government to achieve the good of the city. As a disciple of Socrates, he has witnessed the process and his execution. Two things are noteworthy: Socrates did not want to be part of the regime of the 30 tyrants, nor did he accept compromises to save his life. The unjust condemnation and suppression of his master's life prompted Plato to leave Athens and build the ideal city with his mind. The Republic he imagines is not a utopia, but rather brings together politics and morality as dominant in leading a harmonious common life. We recall that modernity, along with the Prince of Machiavelli, separated the moral policy, considering that politics has its own morality. The ways used to defend the state did not follow moral principles. This is how the famous Machiavellian formula remained: "The goal justifies the means."

In the "Foreword" of the dialogue *The Republic*, Constantin Noica warns the reader that: "Plato does not propose ... to offer an ideal type of state, but an ideal type of human." From this perspective, Noica believes that "the dialogue culminates in the description of five types of people: the man of moral sovereignty and knowledge (here called a royal or aristocratic man), the timocratic, the oligarchic, the democratic and the tyrannical man" [1]. Plato's initial title of the dialogue, *Politeia*, means form of government, a form of rule within the state.

In Plato's conception, the best people must govern, politics having the role of educating the people. Only the wise, the philosophers who know the good can transmit it to the people. In this respect, the first function of politics is the educational one, by seeding transcendental values into the human "internal republic" and realizing a citizen who can

contribute to the good of the city. The ideas Plato conveys are rather theoretical and the style used in the work is a metaphorical one: the cave allegory, the Gyges myth, the theory of forms, the mimesis, the anamnesis, the symbol of the sun.

The dialogue *The Republic* brings forth the following political topics: the principle of justice, the constitution of the ideal state, the environment favorable to political development, the ideal principles of the state and the typology of political regimes. The problem of justice is justified "as a geometric problem", being the mathematical model of the harmony of the city. With these prerequisites Plato begins to imagine the organization of the ideal citadel and the optimal social structure. The leadership and defense of the city is carried out with great care, the arsenal being necessary for the leadership and defense of the fortress. To this profession, the guardians of the fortress, are added the other crafts: "pedagogues, nurses, hairdressers, barbers, cooks, butchers, rhapsodes, theater entrepreneurs, craftsmen of various luxury objects. Everyone has been entrusted with only one job - the one given by nature - to be practiced throughout their entire life, without missing the right time and freed from other occupations" [2].

The status of the property and forms of government

In such an imagined city, the idea of property communion is seen as follows: "no one should possess what today's men possess and (...) as war athletes and guards, receiving annually as protection of the guard, from the others, the food, they must take care of themselves and of the rest of the city" [3]. That is why the leaders of the city must have a special position in its hierarchy, morality being the characteristic feature and the rationality prevailing in decision-making.

Constitutions are, in turn, analyzed in close connection with human characters, because they are not "born of oak or stone" [4]. There are four types of constitutions, similar to "the soul's provisions of individuals" [5]. "The first is the Cretan and Spartan constitution, praised by many; less praised comes the second, the oligarchic one, a constitution full of many evils" [6]. There follows a different one, democracy, the fourth is the "last state of illness of a city," the terrible tyranny, different from the others" [7]. From the state political organization is formed the typology of human behavior: the man formed

by the political regime from Sparta, the oligarchic, the democratic and the tyrannical man. Each type corresponds to a certain conduct in the city. A lover of honors and victories is the human type influenced by the Spartan constitution. The constitution fond of honors will form the timocratic man. The oligarchic man, enjoying "reckless acts", leads to the poverty of others and does not urge the realization of virtue.

Even the chairman and the magistrates of the oligarchs, who get their positions "because they are rich, do not want to lawfully stop the young men who have come to be reckless, to spend and to spoil their wealth because they, the magistrates, buying what young people possess and lending with interest, get even richer and still more respected"[8]. Therefore, in oligarchy the income matters, and the functions, including in the legal field, are obtained in accordance with the financial position, without the appreciation of the professional training and moral qualities. The thinker states that there is a risk that these oligarchs will lead to the poverty of some valuable people. "They hurt them, throwing in their treasures the money that leaves others unceasingly" [9].

All the reckless actions of the oligarchs determine the need for another type of government, the democratic one. "Democracy arises when the poor, by victory, kill some of the rich, cast away others, giving the rest an equal share in civil rights as in dignities, and when, usually, dignities are attributed by drawing lots" [10]. It should be noted that "excessive liberty" can change into "excessive bondage", both at the individual and at the city level. At any time democracy can leave place for tyranny, "from the ultimate freedom emerges the most complete and perfect slavery" [11].

"The degradation of the ideal city is caused by the degradation of the contractual principles on which it is based (...)

-Pleonexia (abuse);

-Interference of functions (a way of doing more at once, and of some that are not our own);

-Lack of temperance (the rupture of a part against the whole so that in the soul rules the one who falls);

- Lack of courage;

- Lack of wisdom (ignorance)" [12].

In a metaphorical style, Plato predicts the danger of the "lethargic and spending" people emerging, as they cause disturbances to any political order. The attention of the magistrates must guard, like the skilled apiary, that those who gather riches, such as bonders, will not generate public harm. The tyrannical man appears from the democratic man and will depart from the authentic life, law and order.

Such a city, imagined in the dialogue of *The Republic*, "which is not anywhere on earth", being more of a heavenly model, will form the framework of analysis in the dialogue *The Laws*, the paper that ends the last period of the philosophical work written by Plato.

The form of the constitutional state

Interestingly, the *Laws* were written in a special socio-political context, with the regime of the 30 tyrants, one that Socrates refused to join, resulting in his trial and condemnation to death. The event disturbs Plato, he leaves Athens and develops a model of city-fortress, Kaliopolis, in which he writes all his ideas on governance. As in *The Republic*, the principle of justice is fundamental to the formation of a model city, Magnesia. The dialogue *The Laws* was considered "the Catechism" of pious people in Greece prior to Christianity. The twelve books in which the dialogue was divided by the publishers make up "a code of the best laws, suited to the best functioning of a State founded in the best possible conditions, in a world of relative contingencies" [13]. The law of the city is the daughter of reason, and wealth and power are very dangerous factors for the life of the city.

The main lack in a State is unbelief, which must be combated and corrective measures must be applied. There is even a correctional institute to cure the citizens from the lack of faith in the gods, and the heretics are educated for a period of five years. This educational tool is the State. It takes care of the healthy development of citizens through an economy that allows them to lead a good life. By the concern of the state, the culture of the people, the rightful legislation, the defense of political freedoms and the relations with other states will also develop. The state must have a suitable territory to defend and a small number of families, 5040. Discontents will be judged by the courts. Some courts will judge private cases and others will judge for the public good. The magistrate "will

enjoy the highest reputation and probity" [14] and, in case of dissatisfaction, the judges will make their decisions in public. In the event of an unjust judgment, "the judge found to have committed this offense will be sentenced to pay to the injured party half of the damage or, in the case of a large loss, he has to be sanctioned "with a fine for the public treasure or the private party having filed the complaint"[15].

The legislation will regulate science and education, thefts and robberies, animal hunting and fishing, rigorously controlled trade, observations on the irrigation system, manual crafts and agricultural practice. "No one is to touch the boundaries that separate the field from that of the fellow neighbor, or the property of the foreigner, whose land is located at the border of the state" [16]. And those "who pass the border of their neighbor and plow their field, shall pay the injured party twofold the damage suffered. The instruction, judgment and execution of such crimes will be done by magistrates of the fields (agronomists)" [17]. Damage can be caused by bee swarms and garbage flames as well as blockage of rainwater, in the event of the last damage, the author "does not want to let the rainwater drain" [18]. The damages that are not properly sanctioned will attract the punishment of the magistrates. Any dissatisfaction will appeal to public tribunals against the magistrates' sentence.

As for the argumentation of the rigidity of market goods, Plato makes clarifications for the trade with agricultural and animal products. The market will be regulated by agronomists as follows: "On the first day of each month, citizens will send to the market, with foreigners or slaves commissioned by them to sell the goods, the twelfth part of the wheat destined for foreigners". In the twelfth day of the month, "the citizen will sell and the foreigner will buy" liquid things for the whole month. On the twenty-third day the cattle trade will be held". The meat will be sold in small quantities to foreigners, whereas the goods necessary for life, "wheat or rice flour" are excluded from the sale.

There is a regulation regarding the way foreigners can operate on the commercial market. "These conditions are: to have a job, not to stay for more than twenty years, starting from the day they signed up; in order to receive it, nothing else is required, except to behave properly; they will not pay any damage for anything they sell or buy; once the deadline expires, they shall leave with all their belongings" [19]. The acquisition of

citizenship for foreigners will be obtained by consulting the city, and for their children, at the age of fifteen they will be able to get their residency and those who wish to leave somewhere else, they can do it after the age of twenty.

Conclusions

The state imagined by Plato is a peaceful one, war being started solely to defend the integrity of the territory. Citizens must have a solid military education, all being compelled to execute the military service. The status of the new state stipulated in the Laws is an agricultural one, the class of the guardians present in the Republic is no longer mentioned as a special one. Agriculture is mentioned as a basic activity in the development of the state and the life of the citizens. It must be practised alongside military and gymnastics exercises. The property on the land is reintroduced in the Laws, each citizen having their own batch of land to work. The philosopher king in The Republic is replaced by the rule of law in the new city; and the aristocratic regime, structured on three social classes, will be nuanced by elements of monarchy and democracy in The Laws. Both works grant a vital role to education, while the state has the role of trainer in cultivating the moral virtues of the citizens.

The elemental instruction is composed of calculations, the art of measurement and astronomy, and the next educational level takes into account the superior culture, refined by the theoretical and practical elements. "Every enlightened man, contemplating the spectacle of the universe, however far from the gods, can not fail to reach a conception of the world contrary to that of the common man" [20]. The true happiness belongs to those endowed with divine wisdom, "those who have been moderate and, by virtue of their nature, partakers of the other virtues, those who, in addition, have mastered all the knowledge required by that elated science (...) all goods have been rewarded by the divinity and thus are enjoyed by them" [21]. Let us not forget that the issue of happiness, as Plato sees it, is directed towards the city and does not stop at the individual level. Once the brighten State is achieved, it can offer happiness to every citizen.

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