

Zbigniew Pańpuch

John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin
Poland

THE FOUNDATIONS OF CLASSICAL THOUGHT ON THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE STATE

The Civil Foundations of Sovereignty (Plato)

Classical political reflection had its birth in ancient times and found expression in the political writings of Plato and Aristotle. The problem that we call today the sovereignty of the state occurs in two contexts: first, the military practice, which was universal in ancient times, that prisoners of war would be captured and made into slaves, which was gradually formalized to become a sort of “institution of slavery,” and second, self-sufficiency (autarky) and independence (economic and political) from others.

Plato was renowned in the history of culture for, among other things, presenting an outline of his conception of the “ideal state” or an ideal system of state government, since the problem of the imperfection of politics was expressed especially starkly by the condemnation “of the best of men” (who were then living)—the condemnation of Socrates to the death sentence in the democratic “parliament” of that time as the result of false accusations and testimonies, and slanders by citizens who disliked Socrates. After making lengthy analyses and presenting his own plan for a political system (in the dialogue *Republic*), he stated finally that it would be enough to find one or a few points, the fewer the better, concerning the constitutions of the time whereby the political systems did badly, and such that if some of them were changed, a particular state could be managed

according to the plan. One such change, though not small or easy, was that philosophers would be made kings, or that kings would be made capable of philosophy.

Plato clearly presented this proposal or wish that politics and philosophy would be united as a necessary condition for stopping evil in politics.¹ According to Plato, this is difficult to understand, but there is no other way to achieve happiness both for the individual and for the community. Without this, it would not be possible for the human race or for a political system to be reborn to see, insofar as this is possible, the “light of the sun.” This enigmatic metaphor is explained in the myth of the cave where a man is freed from the bond imposed on him by life on the body, by his submission to his passions, to habits of upbringing, and to social relations. Plato completed this dramatic proposal by describing in detail who was a true philosopher.

It turns out that he who loves the truth in its entirety,² under the form of all the sciences, and who is insatiable in the love of truth, is not satisfied merely with fragments of the truth. This is because he who loves something, loves the whole, and does not merely love something from the object.³ The true knowledge and vision of “the most true” allows philosophers like painters to transmit to the state what is right, beautiful and good, and if they need to do so, to preserve in the state what still endures. The philosopher wants to comprehend the whole and everything that is divine and human. He sees the entire scope of time, all being, and sees the right proportions of life and death; death is not so terrible from such a perspective.⁴ He loves the truth and aspires with all his strength for what truly

¹ Cf. Plato, *Republic*, 473c11, f.

² Cf. id., 475e7.

³ Cf. id., 474c9. Lovers of the truth differ fundamentally from practitioners, technicians, and those who love to hear beautiful tones, or love to view beautiful colors or shapes, or all the products made from them. This is because they can approach beauty as such and behold it (see id., 476b10). To see beautiful things and to take them as beauty itself is, as it were, life in a dream and it is like possessing a mere illusion that one is seeing true beauty. He who sees in addition beauty itself lives in a wakeful state and possesses knowledge. The knower must know something, and what he knows must be something that exists. That which exists perfectly is perfectly knowable, and what does not exist in any way cannot be known. Something that exists between being and non-being is knowable in the way of opinion. Thus philosophers love true being. They love things that truly exist, that are always the same and immutable, and then they are lovers of wisdom and not of opinion (see id., 480a11).

⁴ The dialogue *Phaedo* shows a true philosopher’s attempt to overcome the fear of death; for Plato, Socrates was certainly such a philosophy. Cf. commentary by R. Legutko in: Platon, *Fedon (Phaedo)*, Polish trans. R. Legutko (Kraków 1995), 28.

exists. He does not stop in his aspiration until he touches the essence of each existing thing. As he approaches and joins himself with what truly exists, he gives birth to reason and truth, he lives truly, and nourishes himself with this.⁵

However, Plato lamented that the best possible occupation would only with difficulty find respect among those who were occupied in something completely opposite.⁶ Here also is probably hidden the greatest problem with the possibility of achieving his proposals: it is almost impossible not only to recognize that philosophers must rule (which could still happen), but also close to impossible that they actually would be recognized as rulers and entrusted with political authority.⁷

If this proposal somewhere were to succeed, then in a good political system not only would it become possible for a philosopher to flourish most greatly, which would be the achievement of his own fulfillment in the good through virtue, but a serious portion of the common good would be

⁵ Cf. Plato, *Republic*, 490b3. Plato added an attitude of living to this theoretical aspect. In this way he created the ideal of the philosopher and sage, not a theoretical philosopher or scientist; for him, injustice, cowardice, and savagery have no access: he is noble. He learns easily, remembers everything, and in his conduct he holds to the proper measure. He possesses perfect virtue, and (as we may suppose) he is able to achieve it in his life, and is able to act in accordance with it in the *polis*. No one can raise any objections against such virtues or against such a nature (see *id.*, 487a, f). The objections that people have against philosophers and philosophy come from the fact that the wrong people engage in philosophy, distorting the meaning of philosophy and propagating a false image of philosophy. The true philosopher is like a helmsman who looks at the stars and, while he says much, his skill as a helmsman saves the people and the ship. Plato compared what was happening in politics at the time to the situation of a ship in which the passengers do not want to submit to the helmsman's skill and argue with him; when the helmsman's commands are not to their liking, they lock him up or kill him, because they do not believe that the knowledge and skill of a helmsman can be learned, and they treat the captain as their own equal. But neither the helmsman can ask the sailors to obey or listen to him, nor can a physician ask his patients to heed him. It is the subject who should ask the ruler to govern them, insofar as he is worthy, adds Plato.

⁶ Cf. *id.*, 489c.

⁷ Another difficulty is the fact that truly philosophical natures are subject to manifold threats from the environment and the political system. The analysis of these social influences ends with the rather pessimistic conclusion that only a very small number of people, who worthily concern themselves with philosophy (see *id.*, 496a11) and who would be able to abide with philosophy, would remain. In an improper political system, in an atmosphere of general demoralization and savagery, they are unable to do much for themselves or for the *polis*, and the life of a lover of wisdom is more to be compared with a constant hiding, or rather, constant avoidance of evil, the avoidance of human injury and affronts to the gods, rather than doing the good in fullness.

rescued for all citizens.⁸ When a true philosopher would find himself in the best political system, just as he is the best, it would turn out that he would be divine, and all else would be merely human.⁹ The state, the political system, and man can become perfect only when true philosophers are concerned with political matters, and when the state becomes obedient to them, or when love for true philosophy inspires the sons of the rulers of the day, or inspires the rulers themselves.¹⁰ The lover of wisdom, the true philosopher, as he has familiar communication with what is divine and orderly, becomes for his own part as divine and orderly as is possible for human nature. This is because it is impossible not to imitate something at which one lingers with enthusiasm. Then he implants the thing to which he has dedicated himself on to individual or public customs; he implants the the thing to which he has dedicated himself in contemplation on to individual or public customs; he does not only shape himself, but he becomes a craftsman who produces temperance, justice, and all kinds of public morality.¹¹ He is the one who leads the prisoners out of the cave of ignorance and desires into the light of the truth and of being, and he shows life to the measure of that light.

Plato thought that it would be best for each person if he were ruled by the rational and divine element, and it would be best for everyone to have such an element in him. If that element were absent, he should command it, as it were, “from the outside,” from someone who possesses it, so that everyone could be similar, joined in friendship, and governed by the same thing.¹² This is because only under the mastery of reason can beliefs be reconciled somehow with each other, can there be mutual understanding, and only the reason makes true friendship possible. This is because if desires are dominant, which are different for different people and are directed in each person to something different, this can only lead to discord and a split in the state, both internally and at the international level.

Thus for someone who had a weak rational element in himself, even slavery would be permissible and fitting in comparison with someone in whom the rational divine element rules, so that for the weak person it would be as if he tasted the direction of reason. When such a person really found himself under the rule of a truly rational man, such a dependence

⁸ Cf. *id.*, 497a4.

⁹ Cf. *id.*, 497b7.

¹⁰ Cf. *id.*, 499b2.

¹¹ Cf. *id.*, 500d4.

¹² Cf. *id.*

certainly would not be harmful to him.¹³ Aristotle took this notion up and developed in the first book of the *Politics* in the conception of slavery by nature.¹⁴

Thus the true philosopher along with the entire state, insofar as it is rightly ruled (that is, it is under the rule of reason), performs the role of completing the rational element in each man, and in this the true philosopher helps people to live rationally and to master their passions. Only in such a political system does it make sense to take up matters of politics, but in others it does not make sense because their purpose is not to educate people or lead them to the fullness of personal development. This conception of politics and the achievement of the tasks set forth are not impossible, although difficult. This would require belief on the part of those people who according to Plato are not all evil by nature, but only discouraged from philosophy by irresponsible people who cultivate philosophy in a dishonest way. However, if they knew a true philosopher, they would be convinced and would not hinder him in exercising government.¹⁵

The fundamental matter for Plato, then, so to speak, is the personal sovereignty¹⁶ of each man; that sovereignty is achieved by independence from lower aspirations such as bodily and sensual desires, the desire for property, riches, or honor, and that a man's life should be directed by reason; also, the reason in turn should be referred to the objective good, the truth, and beauty, which it reads in real reality. All slavery begins with the loss of internal freedom and with submission to the appetites of the lower human faculties, above all the appetitive faculties. According to Plato, the spiritual situation of the individual citizens is carried over almost in a direct manner to the political situation of the state of which they are parts. It depends on this situation whether they will bring themselves to introduce a prudent political system, which on the one hand makes development possible for them, and on the other, provides them with that development

¹³ Cf. id., 590c9.

¹⁴ Cf. Z. Pańpuch, "Problem niewolnictwa u Arystotelesa" ("The problem of slavery in Aristotle"), in *Wierność rzeczywistości. Księga pamiątkowa z okazji jubileuszu pracy naukowej na KUL O. prof. Mieczysława A. Krąpca (Fidelity to reality. Memorial book on the occasion of the jubilee of Fr. Prof. Mieczysław A. Krąpiec's academic work at the Catholic University of Lublin)* (Lublin 2001), 509–526.

¹⁵ Cf. Plato, *Republic*, 499e, ff. It is difficult to say why Plato wrote these words, because after all the truest philosopher had appeared, namely Socrates. Was the point only that people did not recognize him? Or perhaps the majority were evil by nature, since Socrates was sentenced democratically?

¹⁶ Cf. M. A. Krąpiec, *Suwerenność... czyja? (Sovereignty... whose?)* (Łódź 1990).

or guarantees it, brings prosperity to the country, and under favorable conditions even brings political power.

Autarky (Self-Sufficiency) as the Foundation of Sovereignty According to Aristotle

At the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*,¹⁷ Aristotle made a synthesis of two Platonic elements: the idea of politics as a directive or managerial science from the *Statesman*, and the proposal from the concluding sections of the *Laws* that the guardians of the law should be directed by and look to one thing when establishing laws,¹⁸ namely, the goodness of the citizens achieved by a virtuous life, which ultimately bears fruit in fulfillment, which is happiness. Aristotle in his inquiries completed the thought of his predecessor and considered all human cognitive, practical, and productive activity from the point of view of the good, which always appears as the purpose of every desire or aspiration. Since activities and their products are subordinated to each other, and the leading managerial science in the state is politics, the object of politics is the ultimate good, and the purpose of politics, as superior to the purposes of the other sciences, is man's highest and ultimate good.¹⁹

However, in comparison with Plato, who regarded the good of state as a certain unity, or even an organism, as the first and highest good,²⁰ Aristotle identified the purpose of politics with the purpose or end of the individual man. That end is happiness, and Aristotle thought that everyone was in agreement at least as far as what the word meant.²¹ The philosopher defined happiness with the general statement that happiness is to live well and to act well. He presented more precisely in the later parts of his *Nicomachean Ethics* his responses to the question of what it means to live and act well, and what happiness is. At the beginning he only remarked that happiness is the highest good for the individual and the state, but that state seems greater and more perfect, both if it is a question of achieving happi-

¹⁷ Ethics, along with economics and politics, was for the philosopher part of "practical philosophy," which was devoted to man's action (rational action).

¹⁸ In addition, he even indicates the use of the very same metaphor of archers shooting in one direction.

¹⁹ Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094a28.

²⁰ At least this should be the end and purpose of the statesman and or the rulers, that they should have in view the entire political community, and not merely one particular social group.

²¹ Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095a15.

ness and of preserving it. For the individual, happiness is only worthy of love, but it will be more beautiful and more divine for the nation (a group of human beings, society), and for the state.²² In the *Politics* he added that all are agreed that happiness for the individual and for the entire political community are the same thing.²³ Thus when we are thinking of the community, we must at the same time look at individuals and their good, and with a view to them we should shape the state.

Aristotle pondered what the best political community would be for all those who would like to live most according to their wish (or desire),²⁴ and he considered a state that would most greatly make possible a life for people who wanted to live according to what pleased them. The danger arises that by this statement Aristotle would be close to contemporary conceptions of a liberal state where the freedom of individuals becomes an end in itself. However it is clear that in the above mentioned likings or wishes of people, only those are permissible that according to the philosopher have the feature of rightness. In other words, the state should make it possible to live according to the measure of all the right demands or requirements of individuals who want to achieve happiness in a virtuous life. This

²² Cf. id., 1094b7. G. Reale thinks that this statement clearly shows the subordination of ethics to politics, which is evoked by Plato's views and by the typical character of the Hellenistic conception, that "was unable to look at man except as a citizen of the state, and put the state completely above the family and above the particular individual" (G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytniej* (History of ancient philosophy), Polish trans. E. I. Zieliński, vol. 2 (Lublin 1996), 475. M. Kurdziałek presented another opinion in his article "Platońska koncepcja cnót obywatelskich i jej dzieje" ("The Platonic conception of civil virtues and its history"), in *Filozofia. Materiały z XXXIII Tygodnia Filozoficznego* (Philosophy. Materials from the 33rd Philosophical Week) (Lublin 1993), 31. Kurdziałek writes that "Plato certainly thought that Democritus was right . . . that the task of philosophers is to make politics ethic, that is, to make it moral." In Plato's case we cannot speak of subordination, but at most of the parallelism and mutual dependence of the state and the human soul, and so of politics and ethics, and if so, then the converse: we can speak of a certain priority of ethics, in accordance with Socrates' postulate that one should be concerned above all with the soul. With regard to the passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the good of the *polis* is greater insofar, as Aristotle added, as it is a question of the achievement and preservation of that good, because we are no longer striving for the good of particular individuals, but for every good that forms the *polis*, evidence of which is the word *ethnos* added by the philosopher. According to the Liddel-Scott Dictionary, it means: 1) a number of people accustomed to live together, a company, body of men; *ethnos laon*—a host of men; also of animals, swarms, flocks; 2) after Hom., a nation, people; in Ntest. *Ta ethne*—the nations, Gentiles, i. e., all but Jews and Christians; 3) a special class of men, a caste, tribe.

²³ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1324a6.

²⁴ Cf. id., 1260b27.

qualification is necessary, since if the citizens were to have the sort of possibility that Aristotle granted them, i.e., to form (or choose) for themselves a political community according to the measure of their wishes, then what would become of the state if their desires were not good²⁵ and they did not want to live virtuously?

After explaining these key questions concerning the relation of the individual to the state, Aristotle described the nature of the state, which he understood as a certain community. Every community arises because of some sort of good that is the fundamental reason why it came into existence. In this way, the rise of the community is only a particular case of the general principle of the finality or purposefulness of action. This is because each one seems to act always because of some sort of good. Thus all communities aspire to achieve some sort of good, and most of all, the most important community that encompasses all communities does so and strives for the greatest good. That community is the state, called the political community.²⁶ The purpose of that community, in keeping with the earlier conclusions from the *Nichomachean Ethics*, is superior to all sciences and arts.²⁷

The community of gender is the first community in the hierarchy and it is natural already at the biological level, as in other animals and plants, because its necessity results from the natural desire to leave offspring after itself. The philosopher emphasizes that this does not happen by choice. The second community with a necessary character is the connection between one who rules by nature and one who is subject to authority, because the natural ruler by thinking can foresee and give commands, the the subject performs those commands by physical strength, and from there comes their common benefit, and even the survival of the subject, as the philosopher wrote.

²⁵ Aristotle's use of the expression "*kat' euchen*" in the above passage from the *Politics* indicates more the principle of assumption of good intentions or wishes because the first and fundamental meaning of the word "*euche*" is "prayer, the swearing of an oath," and so "wish" is put, as it were, in a religious context, whereby by assumption, as it were, it excludes dishonesty and evil.

²⁶ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252a1.

²⁷ The philosopher engaged in polemics with Plato, who regarded the statesman, the king, and the economist, or slave-owner as the same, and saw between them differences in the number of subjects over whom they had authority. Aristotle here would certainly have liked to remark that it is a question of the rank and character of the good at which they should aim in their actions. Those goods and the communities that arise because of them are hierarchically ordered: the lower ones become part of the higher ones, ultimately forming the *polis*.

Both these communities form a household, that is, a community existing by nature of daily life.²⁸ The next community, namely the village (a small settlement), that is, the first community that goes beyond the satisfaction of daily needs and arises because of benefit, its also natural in character.²⁹ Finally, many small settlements or communities form the perfect community, the state. The perfection of the state consists in the fact that it has achieved its term, a state of autarky, which according to the definition from the *Nicomachean Ethics* consists in the fact that in such a state of society, the life of human beings becomes worthy of choice (and does not come into existence by coercion or biological necessity) and in it nothing is lacking; then one can speak of happiness.³⁰ The political community arises because of life, and it exists so that life may be good.³¹ In this way, the political community becomes the end and purpose of all other communities, and as such it is natural, because nature is the state achieved by any being at the term of its development.³² The philosopher came to the conclusion that in connection with this man is by nature a political being destined to social life,³³ and this is true of man more than of any other animals that live in groups. Someone who lives outside of society is not suited for anything (i.e., he lacks certain elementary skills needed for social life), or he is a superhuman being who does not require anything else for the fullness of his own being.

The fact that man possesses speech is evidence of his social nature. Speech serves not only to express sorrow or joy, as in other animals, but also to describe what is beneficial and harmful, or just and unjust. It is typical of man that only man knows good and evil, just and unjust things, and other things of this sort. A community of such beings forms a homestead and a state.³⁴

It is the condition for a good life and is the purpose or final stage in the organization of human beings into a society; without a society a good life would be impossible for them, and a good life does not become a reality without virtue. The properly shaped political society is thus a necessary condition for the fulfillment of man's life: his happiness—*eudaimonia*.

²⁸ Cf. Aristotle, *Polityka*, 1252b13.

²⁹ Cf. id., 1252b16.

³⁰ Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097b14.

³¹ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252b29.

³² Cf. id., 1252b33.

³³ Cf. id., 1253a5.

³⁴ Cf. id., 1253a15.

This is because no one can be good for himself without regular economic management (home management) or political life.³⁵

This conception of the Greek *polis* differs rather radically from modern conceptions of the state. If we wanted to describe the *polis* in contemporary terms, the most closely corresponding description perhaps would be the state (or perhaps a society) with its entire cultural life, customs, tradition, religion, speech, and history. The state as it is known today has become synonymous with an institution, organization, or bureaucratic structure, which while it has grown in the soil of the nation, yet very often stands in opposition to the good and the development of the nation. The state has ceased to be identified with the nation, and many people even regard the state as their enemy. This breakdown, a sort of alienation of the function of the state from the life and good of the individuals that form the nation, has become the reason for the rise of liberal movements³⁶ that in

³⁵ Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1142a9. E. Fink remarked on this essential aspect of virtue connected with magnanimity (“the man who is the opposite of both of these, who being worthy of great things claims them as his desert, and is of such a character as to deem himself worthy”—Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, 1233a3, f., accessible at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>; cf. also Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 97b17), and said that only the *polis* is the proper field for the life of a free man. The *polis* is a challenge and a task. This is because, on the one hand, individual and familial life are not sufficient for the true autarky of the human being. Man cannot deal with his limitations and fragility in individual life alone, which is obvious, but the community of family life also turns out to be insufficient for this. Only a higher and more perfect organism that is in some way a whole can be in the proper sense the ultimate completion of the individual’s limited and fragile existence. On the other hand, this organism also constitutes a challenge for rationality and human virtue. To refuse, on the one hand, the help of the *polis* in the rational fulfillment of life, and on the other hand, to fail to meet the tasks and requirements it places on the individual, would first of all be stupidity, and second, it would be pusillanimity (insofar as one is worthy of such challenges), and it would be denial of the spirit of nobility, the very essence of aristocracy. The best man must set for himself great requirements, and the domain of life in the *polis* is truly great and essential; in the *polis* one often puts one’s life in the hands of fate, and the fate of all citizens together is determined. It is the task suited for a full and complete man, that is, a man of the best sort, to meet the demands of a prudent life in the case of ordinary citizens, and to shape that life in accordance with the demands of reason in the case of those who wield power. When there are extremely difficult conditions, such as poverty, disasters, or war, one speaks of heroism, immortal reverence, and glory. Cf. E. Fink, *Metaphysik der Erziehung im Weltverständnis von Plato und Aristoteles* (Frankfurt am Main 1960), 245, f.

³⁶ Cf., e.g.: “The state is a necessary evil, and the cultivation of it should not be multiplied over the necessary measure”—K. Popper, *W poszukiwaniu lepszego świata* (*In search of a better world*), Polish trans. A. Malinowski (Warsaw 1997), 180; also A. J. Nock, *Państwo – nasz wróg* (*The state—our enemy*), Polish trans. L. S. Kolek (Lublin 1995). This work analyzes political authority from the society (or nation) to the state, and the results of this

their radical forms call for a minimal role for the state, and say that the state is superfluous or even harmful. Such a “schizophrenia” or alienation of the nation (or, in abstract terms, of society), would have been the worst state of affairs for Plato and Aristotle; it would suggest a degenerate and tyrannical state, something that they opposed to and tried to remedy with all their strength.

In connection with the determination of the state by certain conditions related to its operation, the state has gained, as it were, a certain normative status: not every community that claims this name can be or is really a state. Just as according to the Platonic conception only one proper state could exist, and all others were a better or worse imitation of it, so also Aristotle clearly wrote that it remains clear that concern for the virtuous life should exist in a true state, and not only in what is a state by name.³⁷ Likewise it is not enough to make a military treaty between citizens (that would then be a military league), nor is common concern for material prosperity or the honoring of mutual agreements enough (in that case it would be a business company or firm). If we are to be able to speak of a *polis*, then a community of the good is needed, a community that encompasses households and clans, a community that exists in order to shape and achieve an autarkic (perfect) life,³⁸ so that in this way, including also villages (small communities), to lead them to a happy and morally perfect life.³⁹ In that community, the aim is not only common life, as Plato defined the original or primitive *polis*, but also, and perhaps above all, the aim is beautiful acts,⁴⁰ that is, the achievement of virtue. It follows clearly from this that if the political community does not perform this basic function, and does not make this possible for the citizens, it can be most rightly dissolved, or it can disintegrate completely of its own accord without any official declaration, which provides the same result. Hence the good life, the beautiful acts, and the happiness of the citizens testify that a political society has actually come into existence.

process. W. Galston (in his *Cele liberalizmu (The ends of liberalism)*, Polish trans. A. Pawelec (Kraków 1999), 23) remarks that a certain radical form of political liberalism is based on the belief that the state must be neutral not only to religious beliefs but also to all individual conceptions of the good life, in order to guarantee the maximum of freedom of choice to the citizens.

³⁷ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1280b6.

³⁸ Cf. id., 1280b32.

³⁹ Cf. id., 1281a2.

⁴⁰ Cf. id., 1281a5.

The second conclusion is that the people must want to be realized in the good by a virtuous life, using the community in this, and being in the community. Thus the existence of structures alone, or even of the means suitable for a good life, and so wealth, laws, institutions, or a political system, do not make a community into a true state. Hence we see that it is a certain dynamic and relational reality that joins together people who are realized in the good life and in happiness. Thus if the end is a virtuous life, and through that, the fulfillment of the individual, and the individual for this needs a good (“true”) state as a necessary condition, then there is a necessary connection between the goodness of the citizens and the state.

Aristotle emphasized that by nature man possesses a desire for such an autarkic community, and the one who first coordinated such a community is the cause of the greatest good. This is because just as a refined and perfected man is the best of the animals, so a lawless man without any feeling of justice is the worst of all the animals.⁴¹ Justice as a virtue is therefore political, because justice and what is right are the order of the political community, and the political community is based on the allocation and distribution of what is right and fitting.⁴² It is very important that the political community (or state), while it is from nature, is not natural in the manner of animals, as in the case of other animals that live in groups. A drive for an autarkic community, a community that is sufficient for the good life (i.e., the happy life) and makes that life possible, is natural to man as a moral being that distinguishes between good and evil.

Thus the sentence in the philosopher’s texts about the person who first organizes such a community as the creator of the greatest good is not accidental. As in the case of an organism or a home, the whole is not composed of parts by itself, but a proper cause must act, some agent or mover, so the political community must first be set in order by someone; human beings only possess the potency to create the political community; that potency is expressed in the drive of which the Stagirite wrote. However, he did not describe who organized the political community. It can only be supposed that the Aristotelian First Mover (the Absolute, God), who performs the function of the final cause and is the reason for all organization and all purposeful movements, is ultimately responsible for all good, order, and generation. It is precisely the common good, the ultimate good, that is the reason for the organization of the community.

⁴¹ Cf. *id.*, 1253a30.

⁴² Cf. *id.*, 1253a39.

Only a harmonized political community, or as should be written, one that has been called into existence, is primary and original, keeping in view the perfection of the individual and the individual's achievement of happiness. This is because here it is not a question of the existence of human beings, of which the state would be the consequence, because it also possible for man to live in a familial community or perhaps in some sort of settlement of families, and even to live in some sort of community that seems somewhat political but does not fully deserve the name of a state. However, according to Aristotle that would not be a good life to the measure of man, it would not be autarkic, and so it would not become a happy life, for which the state and man exist. However, without the achievement of happiness, human life would be a contest with constant difficulties and oppositions from the world of nature. It would be a constant "struggle for existence" like the life of animals, a life scarcely made palatable by any admixture of pleasure, and lived only for the sake of arduously won benefits, but not able to rise above them.

The aspiration to form such a community seems to be only a particular formation of the general aspiration that every being has for the good that suits it, for the end that is the realization of the being's own nature. Since man is capable of happiness—the fulfillment of his own life, only when he lives in a community that makes this possible, the community then becomes, as it were, the common good of all the members of society; without the common good they will not achieve happiness, that is, the improvements and constant realization of their own nature. If we keep in mind the normative character of the political community (the state), then we can start to understand that Aristotle wrote of the order of that community, which is justice and the dimension of justice. Otherwise there would be not true state.⁴³

⁴³ The question of the formal element of the *polis* as a discontinuous whole requires completion. On the side of the human subjects, it is the above mentioned universal feature of social character of nature, but it is of a potential character. On the side of the object, it is the common good, which unites the existing community. It is a certain act in which and through which both individual human potencies and social human potencies are actualized, and at the same time it is a whole. Thus against the opinion of the author we are discussing, the category of potency to act in the relation of the citizen to the *polis* here would find its application. Thus the whole man is not in potency to the *polis*, and he is not in potency to the *polis* in his existence, but only in his completion and development (or actualization), as the philosopher wrote—in his autarky, which is not possible without the *polis*.

Where and how does the political community exist? Obviously it only exists in relations between human beings, and only in the sort of relations that produce a good and fulfilled life. For example, it exists in friendship, love, and the other relations that lead to this and are a means to this, e.g., justice. Thus if people will be properly oriented in their actions to the true good and happiness, and everything in their activity will be subordinated to such a fulfillment of their life, then the political community will encompass the whole of their life with all the material, territorial, geographic, and other conditions that go along with it. The mere fact that people are gathered in one territory, that they possess a common speech, and make agreements, and so that they live together, does not make them a full and perfect political community. This is because all this is only a condition or means. It is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. It follows from this that Aristotle saw his own community optimistically as a *polis*, and so as a true state that was suited to the realization of the citizens' happiness in itself (and perhaps he saw some other states in the same way).

The rational justification for the identity of the happiness of the individual and of the state allowed Aristotle to move to the consideration of the external conditions and foundations necessary to achieve a state that would be organized in accordance with the best wishes. This is because just as the happiness of the individual would be impossible without certain external conditions, so the best political system would not arise without commensurate means.⁴⁴ As his master did earlier, the philosopher mentioned the analogy of the politician's (or lawmaker's) action with the activities of a weaver or shipbuilder, considering the quality of the material that determines the beauty of a work of art. The first and fundamental conditions for the state are people, the number and quality of the people, and also the size of its territory, and its properties.

General opinions often identified a happy state with its maximum size, but it is still unclear what the size would be. In this case, the first idea would be to identify the size with a great number of people. Meanwhile Aristotle emphasized that we should consider more their power, since the state like any man has its own task to perform. Therefore the most powerful state would be one that could perform that task to the greatest degree and in the best way.⁴⁵ The power of a state, then, should not be estimated by the number of people who live in it, because that does not determine

⁴⁴ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1325b36.

⁴⁵ Cf. *id.*, 1326a14.

a state's power. Only those who are its proper parts, of which the state's power is composed, as it were, determine the power of a state.⁴⁶ In this sense, the measure of a state's power would be the number of people who realize themselves in happiness.

The postulate of the political community's autarky was made concrete in reference to territory as a necessary condition for its existence. A territory that could provide all the means necessary for a good life would be recommended, since autarky in this aspect would be expressed in the possession of everything so that nothing needed would be lacking.⁴⁷ Of course, the criterion for the state's greatness is that it makes life possible for free people who can enjoy the rest that is necessary for happiness, although it would be at the same time a temperate life. The postulate of temperance plays an essential role here because the excessive pursuit of luxury and excess, on the one hand, causes neglect of the virtuous life, and on the other hand, it necessarily leads to the excessive increase of territory and the consequences already known from Plato's *Republic*.⁴⁸

The philosopher also made a few remarks on the properties of a citizen's character that citizens should show by nature. As in the case of the previous conditions for a good political system, he indicated some inclinations observed in certain nations: a predominance of spirit and severity that is manifested in a combative spirit, along with a lack of ability for the sciences and arts in the peoples of the north, and on the other hand intellectual and creative abilities in the Asian peoples, but a lack of courage, which was the reason they lived in a state of slavery and dependence. While the people of the north maintained freedom, their excess of spirit made it impossible for them to live together in a state and to rule over others clemently.

Citizens who can be led without difficulties to virtue by lawmakers should by nature have intellectual abilities and be full of temperament.⁴⁹ In this way, the Stagirite repeated, as it were, (involuntarily or voluntarily) the idea of his Master: first, concerning the desirable features of perfect guardians from the *Republic*, and second from the *Statesman* concerning the true statesman who joins courageous characters with temperate charac-

⁴⁶ Cf. *id.*, 1326a17.

⁴⁷ Cf. *id.*, 1326b29.

⁴⁸ The need to obtain more and more workers to satisfy the needs of others, although they are difficult to civilize, an increase in various desires, the need to acquire new territories, and consequently war with other states that live in a similar way.

⁴⁹ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1327b38.

ters and, for particular positions, chooses people who combine both those features.

Conclusion

If we look from today's point of view, without doubt one of Plato's achievements was that he called attention to the imperfections connected with in a "state of law" and the dangers that resulted from that for the individual and for his individual good. The desperate attempt to create a conception of a statesman-king who goes beyond the limits of a life according to the law could also have had as its background the drama of the death of Socrates, who to the end remained faithful to the laws of his *polis*. The drama became more powerful because of the contradictions seen in it: the efficient and blind execution of law was a threat to the *polis* and its citizen, while it was even worse to leave things to run their course (that is, anarchy—the absence of government authority). That existentially difficult situation would be absolutely exploited by sophistic politicians who made it difficult for people to acquire true virtue, who with the help of imitative poets and rhetoricians pandered to the tastes of the masses and upheld the *status quo* of Plato's cave (that is, a sort of virtual *matrix*, to speak in contemporary terms).

The philosopher's response was to unmask such a state of affairs and to develop a conception of a *polis* based on laws directed to human virtue, which became easier to understand by a detailed exposition. Plato emphasized the proper shaping of the political and emphasized the importance of harmony and the adaptation of man's own efforts, and the external conditions that affect those efforts, since only then will it be possible to acquire virtue and to acquire virtue in the the fullest possible degree. It seems that when people ignore their own activity or disregard external conditions (such as the political system), this makes it impossible to achieve this goal. Virtue acquired without proper education or upbringing because it is compelled by the structures of the state will be illusory, but without a proper political system virtue will become the heroic accomplishment of a small number of individuals, while for the most part people will fall into disorder and chaos under the influence of deteriorating external conditions.

In Plato and Aristotle, the *polis* turns out to be an important co-factor that determines human goodness, or even we may dare to see, the most important co-factor. In Plato, the *polis* is an essential instrument for

educating man in the hands of the philosopher who holds power in a perfectly shaped political community. Only in such a special environment and climate can man be fulfilled in a rational life. A properly shaped political community is a sort of medium between the order of the cosmos and the soul that is supposed to mirror the cosmos in itself. The *polis* must be built first in the souls of the citizens—this was one of Plato's more important discoveries. As a result, both the ruler and each man becomes similar to God and, as it were, a continuator of God's work; that work consists in bringing order, and so also reason, into the chaos of matter. The ruler sets in order relations between human beings in the *polis*, leads contrary characters to harmony, and intertwines them, and each man brings harmony into the functioning of his three centers of activity: the appetitive, irascible, and rational center, and makes them submit to the rational center. In this sense, each man can become the ruler in his own kingdom and so can fulfill his ambitions for authority.

In Aristotle, the political community appears as a necessary element of human existence that makes it possible for the citizens of that community to complete their own fragile and partial existence and to shape their own life to be morally beautiful. Someone without a political community will not achieve his ultimate end, which is happiness; there will be nowhere to develop his highest potentialities or to realize them in a community of free and equal people. However, for the community to perform its functions and remain itself, the community must be shaped as a "well cultivated field." Man's transcendence and rule over social reality appears here: changes in the political system are possible, and it may be shaped for better or worse, since in social life everything depends on the goodness of the people who give social life a suitable shape.

While the existence of the political community is necessary and follows from human nature, which tends to fulfill itself in happiness, where the *polis* appears as a necessary means to this end and joins all people in the aspiration to the same end into an autarkic whole, yet the organization of the political community is an expression of the human search for the meaning and most perfect form of shared existence. This quest can even lead to the disturbance of old structures and to liberation from the bonds they have produced so that they are redefined and rebound.⁵⁰ Man's freedom to some degree seeks novelties because it seeks the good, or something better, because ultimately its purpose is something best. To fully

⁵⁰ Cf. Fink, *Metaphysik der Erziehung...*, 272.

understand man, it is not enough to know his structure as a being. Man still needs to be seen in his fulfillment, in the fullness of development and action, in the performance of his best possible functions, in keeping with the definition that “the definition (or essence) of something that exists in potency is its act (fulfillment).”⁵¹

However without law, justice, or virtue, man will become the worst of the animals, the most impious, the most savage, and the most wicked by dissipation and voracity.⁵² This will be all the worse when man uses for evil his natural intellectual abilities and capacities to act, which are his natural weapons, and there is nothing worse than injustice that is armed.⁵³ Then he will become completely unpredictable and unintelligible in his action, since we can err and miss the mark in different ways, but we can only be good or hit the target in one way, as Plato and Aristotle metaphorically expressed themselves.

The reflections of the two philosophers on the nature and role of the *polis* was for them only the result of a shift in attention from the individual man to the whole of social relations that surround him. Just as man’s life in the biological dimension depends on whether he encounters around himself favorable conditions for nourishment, shelter, and longer life, so man’s spiritual life depends on how the political community has been shaped, which is man’s natural spiritual environment. A badly formed political community makes it impossible for man to live well or find fulfillment, and in an extreme case, as in the example of Socrates, it can even put him to death. For that reason, Plato and Aristotle examined the nature of the *polis*, tried to understand it, and to plan its functioning so that it would best serve virtue and man’s fulfillment. Ultimately, only such a *polis* ultimately can be called sovereign.

⁵¹ Cf. Aristotle, *On the soul*, 415b14 (author’s translation).

⁵² Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a32.

⁵³ Cf. id., 1253a33.

**THE FOUNDATIONS OF CLASSICAL THOUGHT ON
THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE STATE****SUMMARY**

The article discusses Plato's and Aristotle's writings on the sovereignty of the state. It claims that the reflections of the two philosophers on the nature and role of the *polis* was for them only the result of a shift in attention from the individual man to the whole of social relations that surround him. Just as man's life in the biological dimension depends on whether he encounters around himself favorable conditions for nourishment, shelter, and longer life, so man's spiritual life depends on how the political community has been shaped, which is man's natural spiritual environment. A badly formed political community makes it impossible for man to live well or find fulfillment, and in an extreme case, as in the example of Socrates, it can even put him to death. For that reason, Plato and Aristotle examined the nature of the *polis*, tried to understand it, and to plan its functioning so that it would best serve virtue and man's fulfillment. Ultimately, only such a *polis* ultimately can be called sovereign.

KEYWORDS: sovereignty, state, Plato, Aristotle, politics, authority, nature, man, virtue.