What are Plato’s and Aristotle’s views on the concept of the state?

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Classical Conceptions of the State

There are many views on the concept of the state. In the Dictionary of Antiquity, we read: “As the authority of the economically dominant class, the state arose in the process of the formation of private property.” This early form of exploitation initially demanded such means of power to ensure the oppressors’ order and tranquility.

“However, ancient philosophers believed otherwise. Plato spoke of the state not as an apparatus of repression, but as a kind of good. “When people tried that and the other, that is, they acted unfairly and suffered from injustice, then they found it expedient to agree with each other not to create injustice and not suffer from it. Thus, the state does not punish, but it helps people. Plato also assigns a lot of space to the description of the guardian class, that is, the very forces by which the “order and tranquility of the oppressors” must be ensured. Nevertheless, the soldiers need Plato not to fight their own citizens, but to protect themselves from external enemies. “The future guardian needs this: in addition to being violent, he must by nature also strive for wisdom.” Wisdom gives him the notion of what is right and which is not (Reeve; Schofield).

A philosopher compares a warrior with a guard dog, which must necessarily distinguish between one’s own and another’s. Plato is simply convinced that an ideal state will be no excitement and class clashes that will force the soldiers to come out against their fellow citizens and fight those they are called to defend. Thus, the real state in Plato’s notion is so perfect that its punitive functions go to the second, if not the third, in view of the consciousness of the people of its inhabitants. Aristotle also represented the state as something beautiful in its essence. “The state’s goal is a good life.” He proceeded from the notion that man is “a political being”; striving for communication, and therefore the state needs it for him as air. “Any state is a kind of communication; any communication is organized for the sake of some good.” The most important of all, the most important of all, strives to communicate, which is called the state or political dialogue. “If we analyze this definition, we will meet the word” good “several times, but we will not find any mention of suppression or oppression (Bartlett and Collins; Reeve).

The State as Political Community and Moral Order

Thus, it can be concluded that Aristotle and Plato, who lived in times of severe power crises that came after periods of prosperity, were inclined to view the perverted device not as the essence of the state, but as its distortion. Initially, the state was fair and served not as a machine of enslavement but as something that benefits all citizens. “Politics” of Aristotle, in our perception, is a prescription written for a wonderful medicine that heals all the vices of a sick society. The main drawback, which negates all work, is that there is no such medicine at all, nor is there an ideal state (Karamanolis; Reeve).

According to Aristotle’s teaching, the state is not an economic association, and the goal it pursues is not to protect private interests. The state’s goal is the highest good in general – “eudemonia,” the happiness of citizens in a perfect hostel, communication in a happy life. Therefore, the state’s goal is not in conquests or wars, but in the virtues of citizens and the totality of all the means necessary for its implementation; like Plato, the humane education of citizens in virtue is the main task of the state. Aristotle believes that the state is above the family, above individuals; it refers to its members as a whole to parts; it is the first in nature. However, in order of appearance, the family and the community preceded the state. First, under the influence of a natural inclination, a human family was formed. Then under the pressure of various circumstances, the families rallied to communities (“choirs”), from which states were formed with the further development of human society (Bartlett and Collins; Reeve).

As is known, the large consists of small, as the state consists of families: “communication consisting of several families and aimed at servicing not only short-term needs only – the village… A society consisting of several villages is a fully-fledged state.” Therefore, before proceeding directly to the theory of the state, let us dwell on the details: for example, on the method of supplying the material. This is interesting primarily because the three thinkers we are interested in each chose their own approach (Reeve).

Plato, Aristotle, and the Dialogical Tradition

Plato followed his favorite path: he wrote a treatise, “The State,” in the form of a dialogue between his teacher, Socrates, and others. Thus, he achieved two goals at once. First, he revived the narrative, giving it a touch of artistry; second, he introduced a number of heroes at once, admitting the possibility of expressing not one but several opinions at once. Dialogue takes place in the form of a dispute, agon, during which truth is revealed (Reeve; Dorion).

Aristotle wrote his work “Politics ” as soon as an answer to the Platonic “State,” as well as criticism of other projects of state devices and real construction. (It should be pointed out that criticism here refers to research with the purpose of revealing not only negative but also positive sides, for example, Aristotle speaks very favorably about the Carthaginian Empire.) To criticize something from someone else’s face would be dishonorable and, therefore, quite justified, so the philosopher chose exactly the

form of the first-person narrative. Its main slogan is: “Is it possible for each of them (phenomena, state devices, etc. – a note) to give a scientific explanation? ” (Chappell; Karamanolis; Reeve).

The path of Cicero is like the path of Plato. Everything is again based on dialogue, but it should be taken into account that Cicero, in addition to the conversation, has a strange chapter called “The Dream of Scipio,” which does not belong to any of the books, being independent but at the same time close to the books thematically.

Philosophical Disagreement and the Search for Political Truth

It is also remarkable that Plato initially claims absolute truth but not especially Aristotle, who exposes ideas in an extremely categorical form: “The territory SHALL be difficult to access for intrusion but have convenient exits. As the population SHOULD BE easy to see, it is so easy to foresee MUST BE and the territory,”it is clear that by nature [citizens] MUST be reasonable and courageous,” etc. Though writing on behalf of his teacher Socrates, Plato expresses his views on the state system. Now we throw the bridge from the above reasoning in the form of a presentation directly to the subject of our work – the state. Such a bridge will serve us as a consideration of the question of why these treatises were written (Chappell; Dorion).

It is clear that Aristotle criticized Plato, as well as lesser-known thinkers. In many ways, their work impeded him from writing his own. However, what caused Plato and other philosophers to present their ideas on the state system? The answer to these questions is Aristotle’s dictum: “The intention to find such a state system that is different from existing ones is explained not by the desire to philosophize at any cost, but by the fact that these existing devices do not satisfy their purpose ” (Karamanolis; Reeve).

Historical Crisis and the Purpose of Political Philosophy

Indeed, all three works: “State”, “Politics” and “On the State” – appeared in times of trouble when Greece and Rome experienced hard times. It was then that human minds sought a way out of this situation. Plato and Aristotle were created in the era of the decline of the polis system when its main ideals were lost. Through their works, philosophers have tried partly to revive the dying structure and partly to create something new (Schofield; Reeve).

Thus, it is clear that if philosophers think about the notion of the state, they pursue not speculative, but very specific goals. Therefore, we will analyze their work primarily not as demagogic utterances abstracted from life, but as projects created for a concrete implementation. One can disagree with

this and state that Plato, in his work, “recognized it necessary and created the state as soon as it should be desired, and not something that could be counted on.” Nevertheless, in our opinion, Plato tried to influence the minds of his fellow citizens through dialogue, which means, albeit indirectly, carrying out his ideas, however, inconceivable it might seem. This is also confirmed by the fact that Plato visited Sicily three times, where he collaborated with the tyrants Dionysius the Elder and the Younger and instructed them to create a model of his ideal state in Syracuse. However, these attempts failed (Schofield).

The Good Life and the Ideal State

Aristotle also represented the state as something beautiful in its essence. “The state’s goal is a good life.” He proceeded from the notion that man is “a political being”; striving for communication, and therefore the state needs it for him as air. “Any state is a kind of communication; any communication is organized for the sake of some good. The most important of all is communication, which is called state or political communication. “If we analyze this definition, we will meet the word “good” several times, but we will not find any mention of any suppression or oppression (Bartlett and Collins; Reeve).

Plato and Aristotle, who lived during times of severe power crises that came after periods of prosperity, were inclined to view the perverted device not as the essence of the state, but as its distortion. Initially, the state was fair and served not as a machine of enslavement but as something that benefits all citizens (Karamanolis).

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