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Politeia and Arete. Archeology of Senses and Hellenic Legacy

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POLITEIA AND ARETE

Archaeology of Senses and Hellenic Legacy

I. On Greek and Republican *Politeia*

Aristotle is considered by many to be the ancient root of modern republicanism¹ (naturally without any misunderstanding of the important role of Cicero and of some of the perspectives of Machiavelli). He gives us some clues to help understand the semantic and conceptual question that is at the origin of some contemporary confusion between democracy and republic.

It is a fact that Aristotle is aware of the need for a broad, open definition. He adopts it, explicitly, admitting only that there are situations in which it is not easy to find an adequate expression to include all the reality we would wish². Furthermore, he doesn't get over attached to simple words; he states that what matters is the understanding of things and not the expressions that designate them³.

Some of the concepts used in the political debate are difficult, mostly because of the semantic subversion undergone by some words.

Although Aristotle couldn't guess the sense of ulterior linguistic metamorphosis, he is the first to make some comments, obviously about his own times, and he also makes some observations about past ones. Revealing an accurate linguistic sensibility and conceptual rigor, either he rejoices at the adequacy of sign to meaning⁴, or he underlines the presence of a polissemic situation. In fact, he states that *politeia* has two meanings: either it may be the *polis* where the crowd rules for the public interest (and in this sense it has been translated in many ways: republic, democracy, constitutional government, etc.), or it may be a common name for all political societies⁵.

¹ Cf., v.g., R. LEITE PINTO, *República de Razões*, in "Lusiada. Direito", Série II, n.º 4-5, Lisbon, Universidade Lusíada, 2007, p. 437.

² ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, states that about virtue and vice. Against this vision, PLATO, in *Thaetetus*. Confirming his position, ARISTOTLE, *Politics*, Port. transl., *A Política*, São Paulo, Martins Fontes, 1998, p. 43.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 42..

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 106.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 106.

If Aristotle names as “democracy” the political society corresponding to a corruption of *politeia* (not as a general common name) he does so, nevertheless, with two important provisos. The first one is that if we want to consider democracy as a form of government, we shouldn’t use that word to designate “the chaos” resulting from the corruption of *politeia*-republic⁶. The second proviso Aristotle makes is about the history of language, semantic evolution: he evokes the most ancient use of the word “democracy”, identical to the meaning of *politeia*-republic. It seems, thus, that in spite of the corruption of the word, even nowadays, we are returning to the pre-Aristotelian sense of “democracy” – a positive one.

Aristotle is not alone in these observations. “Democracy” didn’t get very favourable connotations in theoretical speech until comparatively recent times. M. I. Finley underlines the fact that, in the XXth century, there was a semantic mutation that allowed the majority of intellectuals (or they themselves did the semantic mutation – we may suppose) to be quite sympathetic with democracy, exactly the opposite situation to what has occurred in the past, since Classical Greece⁷.

A. H. M. Jones arrives at the same conclusion, which clearly states we have only received from the past testimonials in one way or another favourable to oligarchy⁸. In other words, we have recently gone through a semantic revolution that has made us use the word “democracy”, in its different local variables, to designate, universally, “good government” (of course, in a participative and respectful way).

Jones quotes Palmer⁹, saying it was rare, even among the French *philosophes* who prepared the French Revolution, to find anyone in favour of democracy. Even Wordsworth presents himself as a democrat in a letter dated from 1794, but he does so provocatively. Finally, the author reminds us that the American founding fathers didn’t expect to build a democracy, but a republic¹⁰. And so the confusion persists.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 126.

⁷ M. I. FINLEY, *Democracy ancient and modern*, French trans. by Monique Alexandre, Preface by Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Démocratie antique et démocratie moderne*, Paris, Payot, 1976, p. 54 sq.

⁸ A. H. M. JONES, *Athenian Democracy*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986 ed. (1st ed. Basil Blackweii, 1957), p. 41.

⁹ R. R. PALMER, *Notes on the Use of the Word ‘Democracy’*, 1789-1799, « Political Science Quarterly », 68, 1963, p. 205.

¹⁰ M. I. FINLEY, *Démocratie antique et démocratie moderne*, pp. 55-56.

On the other hand, democracy, republic and even the image of the citizen and of Ancient Greece depend, even today, to a great extent, on the mythology that nourished occidental imaginary at least from the XVIIIth century and was vital to the French Revolution¹¹, exported as the great occidental revolution.

If the ideological recuperation might obscure a more rigorous and crystalline historiography, we must not forget the positive aspects of the immense Greek (and Roman) renaissance during the enlightened and liberal times. Not only a renaissance of memory, but also an institutional and mental recreation. In the XVIIIth century, Paul Hazard writes of this neoclassical epoch: “Quel contraste! Quel brusque passage! La hiérarchie, la discipline, l’ordre que l’autorité se charge d’assurer, les dogmes qui règlent fermement la vie: voilà ce qu’aiment les hommes du dix-septième siècle. Les contraintes, l’autorité, les dogmes, voilà ce que détestent les hommes du dix-huitième siècle, leurs successeurs immédiats. Les premiers sont chrétiens, les autres antichrétiens; les premiers croient au droit divin, et les autres au droit naturel; les premiers vivent à l’aise dans une société qui se divise en classes inégales, les seconds ne rêvent qu’égalité.”¹²

How can we deny the remaking of facts by misleading ideological interpretation in that period? How can we forget the “recuperation” of names, institutions, facts, legends, heroes, dates and places, everything mythicised *ad usum* and *pro domo*? There is a large *corpus* legitimising these recurrent imaginary recalls. But the truth is that it was, in general, a rational, understood language of another reality, a pseudo-history as a parallel set of words, a Utopian experiment. Furthermore, the presence of Greece, mainly in the XVIIIth century proved to be of actuality and richness and also valuable to the centuries to come.

Republicanism and Neorepublicanism are another proof of the presence of classical times in XXth and XXIst centuries. Of course, republican thought is plural: “(...) the republican thought gained new strength at the end of the XX century when Pocock, Wood and Baylin’s historic studies, about an American revolution, allowed the development of abundant literature about virtue, citizenship and politic deliberation in modern societies. Despite the notorious differences of thought, names like Skinner, Petit, Virotti or Spitz became to be seen as epigones of the neo-

¹¹ F. DIAS-PLAJA, *Griegos y Romanos en la Revolución Francesa*, Madrid, “Revista de Occidente“, 1960;

¹² P. HAZARD, *La Crise de la conscience européenne, 1689-1715*, Paris, Fayard, 1961, p. VII.

republicanism movement. Other authors, like Habermas, Walzer, Sandel or Rawls, didn't stand indifferent to the new doctrinal burst. These influences were also felt in the field of Constitutional Law, it being important to mention Michelman, Sunstein, Ackerman or Sherry (...)”¹³.

Leite Pinto, in the original English version of the same paper, underlines the common aspects of neorepublicanism, and he begins by the idea of virtue, in fact the Greek *areté*¹⁴, that overpasses the Machiavellian notion of *virtù*: “There are several neo-republican approaches, some more liberal and others more communitarian in nature. It is possible, however, to identify at least three major common concerns, among others: a) The civic virtue (*virtù* / civic virtue), designating the involvement in the community, the preference for the public interest, the search for a common good as opposed to corruption (the incapability for the free life, the emergence of private interests, the “factions”); b) The political participation that involves an extended process of discussion and deliberation where all can participate in independent and equal conditions (deliberative democracy) in which the argumentation in itself appeals to dialogical reason (*audi alteram partem*) and where conversational compromise gain a decisive importance, c) A certain model of citizenship and patriotism built around a civic conversation, the participation in the ‘polis’ with an emphasis on duty and responsibility.”¹⁵

Of course Neorepublicanism is not the whole of republican contemporary thought, nor contemporary republican *praxis* and, even not being so, it is an expanding universe in itself.

When we ask if Ancient Greece may still have much to teach republican contemporary thought, Kurt A. Raaflaub gives us the best answer: “Directly or indirectly, Athenian democracy as an extraordinary experiment in social history thus stimulates our own thinking about crucial issues of our own democracy and society, incomparably more complex though they are. The point is precisely that the ancients

¹³ R. LEITE PINTO, *Op. Loc. cit.*

¹⁴ A. CAEIRO, *A Areté como Possibilidade extrema do Humano*, Lisbon, Imprensa Nacional – Casa da Moeda, 2002; F. E. PETERS, *Greek Philosophical Terms. A Historical Lexicon*, 2nd. ed., New York, New York University Press, 1974, trad. port. de Beatriz Rodrigues Barbosa, Preface by Miguel Baptista Pereira, *Termos Filosóficos Gregos. Um Léxico Histórico*, Lisboa, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1997, pp. 38-39.

¹⁵ R. LEITE PINTO, *Neo-Republicanism and Constitutional Law. A Republic of Reasons*, Communication to the VIIth International Congress of Constitutional Law Association (Athens, 11-15 de July 2007). Cf. Idem, *República de Razões*, p. 439.

help us focus on the essentials.”¹⁶ Athens is the model, as the regretful Camille Desmoulins already thought: “Nous ne prétendons point jeter la république française dans le moule de celle de Sparte; nous ne voulons lui donner ni l’austérité ni la corruption du cloître”¹⁷.

II. On Greek and Republican *Arete*

The democratic and republican Greek legacy might help contemporary democracies in many aspects. For example, the problem of the payment of magistrates (connected with *mistophoria*), their selection (election and rotation in post, selection by drawing lots, etc.), the rule of minorities or majorities and its connection with social classes, etc. But in the heart of the republic there is a major question, which the Greeks developed: virtue. Remembering, of course, namely with Rawls, that Greek virtue is not the modern concept¹⁸.

Let’s make the reverse intellectual trip, from more recent times to the past. Or, better, let’s begin *in medias res*, but not so long ago, with the situation of crises, as described by Paul Valéry: “VERTU Messieurs, ce mot Vertu est mort, ou, du moins, il se meurt. Vertu ne se dit plus qu’à peine. Aux esprits d’aujourd’hui, il ne vient plus s’offrir de soi, comme une expression spontanée de la pensée d’une réalité actuelle. Il n’est plus un de ces éléments immédiats du vocabulaire vivant en nous, dont la facilité et la fréquence manifestent les véritables exigences de notre sensibilité et de notre intellect. (...) Quant à moi, je l’avoue – je me risque à vous en faire l’aveu – je ne l’ai jamais entendu... Ou plutôt, ce qui est bien plus grave, je ne l’ai jamais entendu que remarquablement rare et toujours ironiquement dit, dans les propos du monde (...)”¹⁹.

Later, Aldous Huxley said, with irrefutable sagacity: « We should note that, to be diabolic on the grand scale, one must, like Milton’s Satan, exhibit to a high degree all the moral virtues, except charity and wisdom ».

The association of virtues with pious naïveté, or dark hypocrisy, deeply eroded the fortune of both the expression and the concept of « virtue ». This situation was only intellectually (not socially, where prejudice against virtue still rules in many

¹⁶ K. A. RAAFLAUB *et al.*, *Origins of Democracy in Ancient Greece*, Berkeley *et al.*, University of California Press, 2007, introduction, p. 13.

¹⁷ C. DESMOULINS, Speech on Virtue, in *Moniteur*, 7 de Feveireiro de 1794.

¹⁸ J. RAWLS, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, ed. Barbara Herman, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2000, Introduction, § 1-3.

¹⁹ P. VALÉRY, “Rapport sur les prix de vertu”, in *Oeuvres*, I, ed. by Jean Hytier, Paris, Gallimard, 1957, pp. 939-940.

circles) overcome at the end of the XXth century, when ethicists and moral philosophers from different origins and positions (this pluralism helped, by dissipating prejudices about a confessional or ideological campaign) began its rehabilitation²⁰.

The crisis surrounding the idea of virtue was not new. A learned and sceptical body of thought was in existence, before the Enlightenment. Just an example : La Rochefoucauld begins his *Réflexions ou sentences et maximes morales*, from 1678, with this simple and cutting sentence: « Nos vertus ne sont le plus souvent que des vices déguisés »²¹.

A veil of oblivion then passed (though only socially, because some elites always esteemed the political importance of virtue and virtues). Between the relativist and sceptic of the XXth century and the pessimistic of the XVIIth, united by a certain « pose », intelligent but without solutions, the excellent Montesquieu is the one who explains the very essence of different kinds or forms of government, and shows that virtue is the *conditio sine qua non* of republics : “Il ne faut pas beaucoup de probité, pour qu’un gouvernement monarchique ou un gouvernement despotique se maintiennent ou se soutiennent. La force des lois dans l’un, le bras du prince toujours levé dans l’autre, règlent ou contiennent tout. Mais, dans un Etat populaire, il faut un ressort de plus, qui est la VERTU”²². Once ignored or suffocated, virtue, we know

²⁰ Among a multitude of works, J. RACHELS, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 4.^a ed., McGraw-Hill, 2003, trad. port. de Roberto Cavallari Filho, *Os Elementos da Filosofia Moral*, 4.^a ed., Barueri, São Paulo, Manole, 2006; J. F. ALMEIDA, *Valores e Representações Sociais*, Col. António Firmino da Costa, Lisbon, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1990; C. R. ARICÓ, *Arqueologia da Ética*, São Paulo, Ícone, 2001; V. JANKÉLÉVITCH, *Le sérieux de l’intention. Traité des vertus I*, Paris, Flammarion, 1983; J. RAZ, *Value, Respect and Attachment*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001; E. MOUTSOPOULOS, *L’Univers des valeurs. Univers de l’homme*, Atenas, Academia de Atenas, 2005; A. COMTE-SPONVILLE, *Petit Traité des Grandes Vertues*, Paris, P.U.F., 1995; ALAIN — “Les quatre vertues”, in *Propos*, I, Paris, Gallimard, 1956; A. MACINTYRE, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory*; reed., Londres, Duckworth, 1985; Idem — *A Short History of Ethics*, 9.^a reimpr., Routledge, 1993; R. KUTTNER, *Everything for sale. The virtues and limits of markets*, 1996, trad. port. de Cláudio Weber Abramo, *Tudo à Venda. As Virtudes e os Limites do Mercado*, São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 1998; C. ANTUNES, *A Linguagem do Afeto. Como Ensinar Virtudes e Transmitir Valores*, Campinas, SP, Papirus, 2005. Concrete virtues: J. LAUAND, *Filosofia, Linguagem, Arte e Educação*, São Paulo, ESDC / CEMOROC – EDF – FEUSOP / Factash Editora, 2007, p. 151 ss.; P. FERREIRA DA CUNHA, *Aristóteles: Filosofia do Homem – Ética e Política*, in “Revista Internacional d’Humanitats”, Barcelona, ano VIII, n.º 8, 2005; Idem — “As Duas Justiças – Justiça Moral e Política vs. Justiça Jurídica (A partir do Comentário de Tomás de Aquino ao Livro V da Ética a Nicómaco de Aristóteles)”, in *O Século de Antígona*, Coimbra, Almedina, 2003, pp. 43-70, max. 57 ss.

²¹ LA ROCHEFOUCAULD, *Réflexions ou sentences et maximes morales*, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. L. Martin-Chauffier, Paris, Gallimard, 1957, p. 389.

²² MONTESQUIEU, *De l’Esprit des lois*, III, 3.

how a republic is lost: “Lorsque cette vertu cesse, l'ambition entre dans les cœurs qui peuvent la recevoir, et l'avarice entre dans tous. Les désirs changent d'objets: ce qu'on aimait, on ne l'aime plus; on était libre avec les lois, on veut être libre contre elles. Chaque citoyen est comme un esclave échappé de la maison de son maître; ce qui était *maxime*, on l'appelle *rigueur*; ce qui était *règle*, on l'appelle *gêne*; ce qui y était *attention*, on l'appelle *crainte*. C'est la frugalité qui y est l'avarice, et non pas le désir d'avoir. Autrefois le bien des particuliers faisait le trésor public; mais pour lors le trésor public devient le patrimoine des particuliers. La république est une dépouille; et sa force n'est plus que le pouvoir de quelques citoyens et la licence de tous.”²³

Montesquieu was inspired by the Ancient Greeks, and one of his major sources is Pericles' speech, honouring the first Athenian soldiers who died in the Peloponnesian war, recreated in the words of Tuchydidides²⁴: "Our constitution does not copy the laws of neighbouring states; we are rather a pattern to others than imitators ourselves. Its administration favours the many instead of the few; this is why it is called a democracy. If we look at the laws, they afford equal justice to all in their private differences; in the absence of social standing, advancement in public life falls to one's reputation for ability, class considerations not being allowed to interfere with merit; nor again does poverty bar the way, if a man is able to serve the state, he is not hindered by the obscurity of his condition. The freedom which we enjoy in our government extends also to our ordinary life. There, far from exercising a jealous surveillance over each other, we do not feel called upon to be angry with our neighbour for doing what he likes, or even to indulge in those injurious looks which cannot fail to be offensive, although they inflict no positive penalty. But all this ease in our private relations does not make us lawless as citizens. Against this, fear is our chief safeguard, teaching us to obey the magistrates and the laws, particularly as regards the protection of the injured, whether they are actually on the statute book, or belong to that code which, although unwritten, yet cannot be broken without acknowledged disgrace. Further, we provide plenty of means for the mind to refresh itself from business. We celebrate games and sacrifices all the year round, and the elegance of our private establishments forms a daily source of pleasure and helps to banish the spleen; while the magnitude of our city draws the produce of the world into our harbour, so that to the Athenian the fruits of other countries are as familiar a luxury as those of his own. If we turn to our military policy, there also we differ from our antagonists. We throw open our city to the world, and never by alien acts exclude foreigners from any opportunity of learning or observing,

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ TUCHYDIDES, *The History of Peloponnesian War*, Book II.

although the eyes of an enemy may occasionally profit by our liberality; trusting less in system and policy than to the native spirit of our citizens; while in education, where our rivals from their very cradles by a painful discipline seek after manliness, at Athens we live exactly as we please, and yet are just as ready to encounter every legitimate danger. (...) Nor are these the only points in which our city is worthy of admiration. We cultivate refinement without extravagance and knowledge without effeminacy; wealth we employ more for use than for show, and place the real disgrace of poverty not in owning to the fact but in declining the struggle against it. Our public men have, besides politics, their private affairs to attend to, and our ordinary citizens, though occupied with the pursuits of industry, are still fair judges of public matters; for, unlike any other nation, regarding him who takes no part in these duties not as unambitious but as useless, we Athenians are able to judge at all events if we cannot originate, and, instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling-block in the way of action, we think it an indispensable preliminary to any wise action at all. Again, in our enterprises we present the singular spectacle of daring and deliberation, each carried to its highest point, and both united in the same persons; although usually decision is the fruit of ignorance, hesitation of reflection. But the palm of courage will surely be adjudged most justly to those, who best know the difference between hardship and pleasure and yet are never tempted to shrink from danger. In generosity we are equally singular, acquiring our friends by conferring, not by receiving, favours. Yet, of course, the doer of the favour is the firmer friend of the two, in order by continued kindness to keep the recipient in his debt; while the debtor feels less keenly from the very consciousness that the return he makes will be a payment, not a free gift. And it is only the Athenians, who, fearless of consequences, confer their benefits not from calculations of expediency, but in the confidence of liberality. In short, I say that as a city we are the school of Hellas, while I doubt if the world can produce a man who, where he has only himself to depend upon, is equal to so many emergencies, and graced by so happy a versatility, as the Athenian”.²⁵

Throughout the whole text (from which we have just quoted some parts) there is a latent idea of merit, of duty (and reciprocal duties – from the citizens to the republic and *vice versa*), and we feel the presence of many elements of the “republican form of government”, constitutionally consecrated by some contemporary constitutions, such as the French and the Portuguese. In Pericles’ speech are present some elements (not all) of the republican government *topica*: the rule of majority for deliberation, but

²⁵ TUCHYDIDES, *The History of Peloponesian War*, book II: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pericles.htm>

deliberation after discussion - and majority rule not only as a due process, a democratic one, but also as demophilia: ruling for the majority and for the poorer. Another topic is meritocracy, prize due to virtue, with no discrimination of the poor and no privilege for the rich, giving honours to those who deserve them (even posthumous honours, as it is the case). Also, it is a matter of providing assistance to those who need it (like war orphans). So, it is not a question of mere equality in the face of the law, but assistance to those in need, with a fight against poverty. Furthermore: the republic, without luxury, without grasping, cultivates culture and education. And from all citizens (we know the non universality of citizenship in Athens, of course: but it's the beginning and the inspiration that matters now) demands civic participation.

One could hardly find a text so accurate, so direct, with so many essential aspects of republican life in so few lines, although not all the republican contemporary aspects are mentioned.

We may analyze the main republican values “translated” into virtues (seen from the subjective and practical stand point) as such²⁶:

First of all, the Republic needs active citizenship, even with the exaltation of the social and communitarian feeling of being a common idea, “respublica”.

The Republic doesn't survive without personal and social values: with the individual sense and practice of honour and merit by work, but far from the illusion of the idol of economicism, the mystic of success for success itself, a great inductor of immorality.

The Republic lives by a public and national culture, by the exercise of democratic authority, by a culture of public service and a balanced role of the State, endorsing values of equality and justice. Let us not confuse the need for identity with xenophobia or senile nationalism: it is a matter of national cultural identity, with a universal sense of Humanity.

Finally, we must say that the Republic only lives by politics, so it is crucial to reinstate the value of politics and the general respect for politicians. That obviously would demand an enormous effort of self-regulation by the political class, reinforcing

²⁶ For this synthesis, we took inspiration from A. REIS, *Os Valores Republicanos Ontem e Hoje*, in *A República Ontem e Hoje*, ed. by António Reis, II Curso Livre de História Contemporânea, Lisbon, Colibri, 2002, p. 28. The author's perspective concerns the menaces against values; ours, the values themselves. All the extrapolations and the responsibility for the author's thought interpretation are, of course, only ours.

its virtues and its visibility – without marketing mirages and without fundamentalist policies, naturally.

Different levels of existence find a parallel in Hellenic classical virtues: the sensual plan has in *sophrosyne* its moderation, the superior function of affection has *andria* as the point of balance (very close to “virility” in older interpretations), and finally the highest level of human aspects, reason, has to be enlightened by prudence or wisdom, *phronesis*. The good relationship among these principal virtues (cardinal virtues they would be called, in opposition to faith, hope and charity, baptized as theologian) is indicative, to Heraclites²⁷ and then to Plato, of an even superior virtue, that keeps them all in unity: *diakaiosyne*, or justice. Because of that, Justice is the most important²⁸, though not all authors (e.g. Pieper) agree with that precedence, preferring prudence as the queen of virtues²⁹.

Naturally, the Christianization of virtues implied some changes in their connotation. *Sophrosyne* becomes synonymous with temperance, and *andria* loses all its former viril connotations, to become victory over oneself. It's important, therefore, not to confuse the concepts of *phronesis* and *acidia*³⁰, the real capital sin, that some very erroneously translate as laziness, not a sin at all. As for *diakaiosyne*, the band she has in her eyes shows the autism she often incarnates.

Encompassing these virtues in general, the ancient Athenians, like the citizens of today, need more while they act, especially as citizens and as politicians. For example: no need to invoke The *Fable of the Bees*³¹ to recognize that public virtues are, for the Republic, more important than private ones. Ortega y Gasset demonstrated this by analyzing the political genius of someone privately not so virtuous: Mirabeau³². But there are more: probably those who face a public life need more courage, more

²⁷ DIELS, frg. 12.

²⁸ J. MARIAS, *Historia de la Filosofía*, 4.^a ed. ampliada, Madrid, Manuales de la Revista de Occidente, 1948, pp. 62-63.

²⁹ J. PIEPER, *Menschliches Richtigsein*, Port. Translation by Jean Lauand, *Estar certo enquanto homem - as virtudes cardeais*, in “Videtur”, n.º 11: <http://www.hottopos.com.br/videtur11/estcert.htm>

³⁰ J. LAUAND, *O Pecado Capital da Acídia na Análise de Tomás de Aquino*, in “Videtur”, CEMOROC, USP, Porto, n. 28, 2004. pp. 35-62.

³¹ B. MANDEVILLE, Bernard, *The Fable of the Bees or Private vices, Publick Benefits*, Indianapolis, Liberty Classics, 1988, 2 vols. [1.º ed. 1714].

³² J. ORTEGA Y GASSET, *Historia como Sistema. Mirabeau ou o político*, Port. trans., Brasília, Ed. Univ. Brasília, 1982. See also L. CASTE, *Mirabeau*, Lyon, H. Lardanchet, 1942 ; Duc DE CASTRIES, *Mirabeau ou l'échec du destin*, Paris, Fayard, 1960.

accounting scruples (and a clear and rigorous distinction between public and private property), and more prudence. Prudence is very necessary today, when all seem thirsty to announce bombastic measures without honest study and deep consideration. When oppositions seem to be tempted to promise far away Moons, and governments, in return, living there so often, declare that all their subjects (or objects?) already live in a never-ending honey-moon, whilst ignoring those in need, or treating them only as a pretext for their self-promotion.

But we cannot forget that everyone involved in public affairs needs an accurate sense of justice in abundance, and the habit of practising it. Justice with equity, with fairness, giving to each one his or her due, after balancing the parts, and treating with equality what is alike, and differently what is not alike, according to their respective dissimilarities.

This fairness seems to be widely forgotten nowadays, because closeness, lobbying and protest, either forcing the hand of powers in their favour, or crystallizing power in irreducible positions, death to all claims, are both vicious exaggerations. Virtue is here in a sane dialogue, without fearful laxity, without rigid autism.

We cannot have a normative ethics of virtues completely identical for all people³³. Even if this may trouble our moral beliefs, could we demand from everyone, absolutely everyone, and in every circumstance, respect for a simple, plain commandment, such as “Thou shall not kill”? Should we consider as a killer, morally reprehensible, the soldier who kills in self-defence facing the enemy, in a justifiable war in ultimate defence of his fatherland? Even if it was not in actual self defence... We think not.

A fortiori, we are not entitled to demand from every person, every citizen, conformity to every single virtue, or, at least, the same degree of virtuousness in every one. A trader, a finance expert, or a banker may have problems resisting the temptation of a dissolute life (although, if they get their position on their own merit, they may be trained to resist these temptations), but even liberality may be difficult for them, especially in hard times. Maybe they incline towards the vice of avarice, being so much safer. Perhaps also their social function is safer, for the common good,

³³ Cf., v.g., J. RACHELS, *Os Elementos da Filosofia Moral*, p. 119 sq.

as they are the keepers of many peoples' trust. There are more forgiven vices in some situations than in others, in some people than in others.

On the other hand, a young idealistic soldier in a war of independence has a justifiable excuse if he is rash. One thing is sure: he cannot be a coward. That would be shameful and an outrage, a real anti-virtue, a vice.

In spite of some current ideas in some societies, it seems not so relevant, in political terms, that a politician must be as chaste as a monk, provided he is as cautious as a cardinal. On the other hand, more dangerous symptoms are those of indiscretion, volubility, pusillanimity, lukewarmness, dissipation, vanity and even acedia, of course. Characteristics not to trust are also extreme mutism, rigidity, reaction to change, avarice (like Salazar), or hyperactivity (unless in times of war, like the man who almost never slept, Churchill).

Aristotle makes a decisive theorization on vices and virtues in his *Nichomachean Ethics* and, in addition, he is very modern: he begins discussing what Happiness means, the same happiness we have to pursue and has gained its place in the US Declaration of Independence and which is nowadays, a general constitutional concept.

Pleasure is merely a slave passion of either the plebeians or the perverted upper classes, as well as healthiness, leading to a miserable life of troubles, often taken to be an end and not a means. After a great deal of seeking, he arrives at politics. Would the end of political life be honour? Aristotle distrusts it, because it depends on fame and fortune, without any value of its own. On the contrary, virtue has its own light. Although it cannot be confused with happiness: there may be weak virtuous people, not happy, and, still worse, unhappy virtuous ones³⁴.

Happiness is according to the highest human virtue³⁵. Contemplative life is, according to the philosopher, the happiest life, although it depends on some material prosperity being present³⁶. Aristotle ends by identifying such happiness with a certain activity of the soul, according to a perfect virtue³⁷.

Descending to active life, the true politician (the good politician) would be the one who desires to make his or her fellow citizens good people. Of course, not saints, heroes, martyrs, or even sages, but people with the diligence of the good

³⁴ ARISTOTLE, *Nichomachean Ethics*, I, 3.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, X, 7.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, X, 9.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, I, 13.

paterfamilias, or a little bit more... For that the study of virtues, and their practice, is important³⁸, be they intellectual (such as wisdom, intelligence and prudence), or moral (liberality and moderation).

Intellectual virtues need to a great extent education, experience and time. But moral virtues are not a natural or immanent product. Nature (and it is very complex to speak of nature in these matters) only made us receptive to virtues, capable of virtues, but this ability, potential, requires the action absolutely, as a result of maturity and habits. In Mankind, virtues are not naturally active, but only potentially so³⁹.

It is only by practice that we may learn, and it is by practising virtues that we become virtuous⁴⁰. This is also the case in political life. We become just people not because we have the knowledge, intellectual knowledge, of what is justice, but by practising justice, and the more we practise justice the more we may become just⁴¹. That is one reason for acquiring good habits from our earliest childhood⁴². Sane education, as Plato already stated, consists precisely in finding early pleasures and sacrifice or displeasures in the things that are respectively convenient or inconvenient⁴³, and not being indifferent to our lives, facing pleasure or pain with a sane or vicious attitude⁴⁴.

Even extremely virtuous actions depend on the virtuous disposition of the agent: there must be a free disposition when performing an action, coming from the will, and it must be a decided action⁴⁵. No patient cures himself by reading or knowing by heart medical prescriptions: virtue must be a practice, as a result of a voluntary act. The only difficult case is that of justice, juridical justice: one may act justly in a bad mood. If one pays one's taxes correctly, that is juridicially independent of his or her good will...

Virtues (as well as vices) are not affective moods or affections, nor faculties, they are dispositions: a certain form of living out one's affections⁴⁶. If we are in a good mood, being well-disposed, we are facing virtues; if it is bad, vices. The ideal is

³⁸ *Ibidem*, I, 13.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, II, 1.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem* e II, 3.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, II, 1.

⁴² *Ibidem*, II, 1 *in fine*.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, II, 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, II, 2, *in fine*.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, II, 3.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, II, 5.

when the emotions come at the right moment, conveniently and for adequate reasons.⁴⁷

Virtue is, then, in relation to being, a habit, that may be perfected by continuous practice, from childhood, and has to be an objective of education, although it is a fact that young people prefer pleasure to virtue, and it may be not only or chiefly them.

Virtue itself appears as one (although embracing a certain spectrum of possibilities - thus a slight deviation in one direction or another is not condemnable⁴⁸), making its way through a plurality of errors, by excess or by defect. Virtue is really in the middle⁴⁹, between two major exaggerations, though one not being precisely the symmetrical error of the other, because nature normally inclines people in each case more towards one than towards another. But this middle position is neither mediocre nor median; it is at the summit in the order of excellence and perfection⁵⁰.

Virtue resides, thus, in equilibrium: between cowardice and rashness, courage is the real virtue, although, in general, the daring is less criticisable than the coward; between license and insensibility (a name advanced by Aristotle), moderation (the Christian “temperance”) is the virtue; between prodigality and avarice, liberality or generosity is the virtue.

We must be aware of the fact that some of these words have undergone conceptual mutations. Liberality or parsimony may also, in current language, mean something totally different from a virtue and a vice, respectively.

There are also exceptional cases, in which there is no word for the middle virtue. In these situations people generally praise one or the other of the extreme terms: for example, that is the case of ambition⁵¹. In fact, either one praises or criticizes the absence of ambition or its excess... depending on the context.

We also find middle terms in the domain of the affections. Reserve is not a virtue, but the reserved person is praised, being between the shy and the impudent.

It is in the virtue of Justice that it is harder to find the right middle term. Aristotle has this notion, and postpones the solution, advancing the dichotomy between a general justice (a virtue) and the particular or juridical justice (that seems

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, II, 5.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, II, 9.

⁴⁹ About this Aristotelian ethical middle term, see, v.g., Giorgios ILIOPOULOS, *Mesotes und Erfahrung in der Aristotelischen Ethik*, in φιλοσοφία n.º 33, Athens, 2003, p. 194 ss..

⁵⁰ ARISTÓTELES, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 6.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, II, 7. E IV, 10.

to be a different thing), thus making the most relevant epistemological cut that lead to the theoretical autonomy of Law⁵².

The Philosopher doesn't ignore the subjectivity inherent in these categories. In a word, the coward always criticizes the boldness of the courageous, and this latter will always be seen as a coward by the daring⁵³. The perspective depends a lot on the place from which one is observing.

Book III of *Ethics* continues discussing the question of the voluntary nature of acts and choices, reaffirming the voluntary character of virtues and vices⁵⁴. And after the general recapitulation of III, 8, Aristotle analyses virtues in particular, beginning with courage.

But the general theorization we remember here goes far enough to state that the etiologic theory of virtues made by Aristotle, with the normative consideration of virtue in the middle term, is especially suitable for usage in the complex and moving reality of politics, being like the rule of Lesbos, adaptable to the different object it had to measure.

It would be simply useless to praise an ideal superlative political virtue, shining on the summit of a mountain of sacrifice and repression, reverted to hate and hypocrite revenge. Virtue is moderation, equilibrium. Vinicius de Moraes, the Brazilian diplomat and poet, was right to alert us to the danger of false virtues, and hypocritical virtuous people, in his *Letter to the Pure*⁵⁵:

“(...) O, you the wise; O, you the resentful / You that count everything in terms of conflict / And are unable to ask without a shout / And cannot win without making losers / O you who buy yourselves with the alms of the poor / Who are freely given God in exchange for leftovers/ And who write noble feelings in capitals / You love to say you are honest men“ (...)”.

⁵² A synthesis of this problem in P. FERREIRA DA CUNHA, *Filosofia do Direito*, Coimbra, Almedina, 2006, p. 215 sq. Idem, *Repensar a Política. Ciência & Ideologia*, 2nd ed., Coimbra, Almedina, 2007, p. 70 sq. and p. 146 sq.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, II, 8.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, III, 7.

⁵⁵ V. MORAES, “Carta aos Puros”, *Poesia Completa e Prosa*, org. de Alexei Bueno, Rio de Janeiro, Nova Aguilar, 1998, pp. 433-435. Original text of these strophes: “ (...) Ó vós os curiais; ó vós, os ressentidos / Que tudo equacionais em termos de conflito / E não sabeis pedir sem ter recurso ao grito / E não sabeis vencer se não houver vencidos. // Ó vós que vos comprais com a esmola feita aos pobres / Que vos dão Deus de graça em troca de alguns restos / E maiusculizais os sentimentos nobres / E gostais de dizer que sois homens honestos.(...)”.

Because of this, the so-called saviours of the republics are never those who may save the republic. They are, on the contrary, those who suffocate republics. And the official, pompous defenders of ethics, morality and good customs often have their Achilles' heels, as we have seen. But still that doesn't mean that, with moderation and discretion, one should not defend ethics, especially, in a less subtle way, republican ethics.

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Abstract:

The idea of the Republic and its value is again the order of the day, not only due to Neorepublican theorists, but also because of many current debates, such as multiculturalism, the laicity of states and societies, transparency and corruption, etc. Along with Republican constitutional rules, principles and values, some proclaimed during the French Revolution (such as *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*), the debate shows the importance of an even deeper question: the importance of virtues, and the Greek legacy of Republican virtues. In this paper, among other points, we remember Pericles' funereal speech in Thucydides' *History of Peloponnesian War*, and some parts of Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, not principally as two important roots of traditional Republican Ethics (although, the first text, is especially influential, namely in Montesquieu's theory of the essence of the Republic in *De l'Esprit des Lois*) but as an inspiration to contemporary new Republican Ethics.

