

## THE PLATONIC CONCEPT OF PEACE AS A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT

### ABSTRACT

Plato is the first philosopher who speaks about the genesis of dialectic between civil war and outside war. The war among States may be considered a righteous war when an outside enemy threatens the freedom of the polis, as freedom – from Plato's point of view and the whole classical Greek culture point of view – is the fundamental human right that makes a man a citizen and not a slave. From Plato's point of view this objective can be achieved by means of the education promoted by the State that helps the citizens to realize his essence as man. The State, therefore, realizes the natural order among citizens thus educated, that may only consist in a proportional equality of all citizens for their friendship and thus for peace. The polis becomes a unity and a real political community only thanks to the peace granted by that friendship.

**KEYWORDS:** *Plato, human rights, concept of peace, civil war*

### INTRODUCTION

The Book V of the *Republic* of Plato describes, as we know, the model of the perfect city, ruled according to justice, without *stasis* and *pleonexia*. Before the debate (466d6–472a7) preceding the discussion that leads to the principle of the city ruled by philosophers, Socrates, focuses on the lawfulness to enslave the inhabitants of other Greek cities. On this subject the philosopher answers no to a specific question of Glaucon, and, dealing with the very sides

of the conflict, he explains that the name of the disagreement are two and they are different: *polemos* and *stasis*<sup>1</sup>. The short but intense discussion – with the first pages of the *Laws* – lays the groundwork for a rational speech on peace, which is interesting to understand the core of the Platonic discussion, which is to get the brotherhood of the Hellenic nation<sup>2</sup>. In 470e Plato clearly says that his own polis is Greek by origin and ideals, which means that, inside the State the philosopher is building, the educational and civil Greek principles are led to the highest ideal level; the brotherhood that Plato wants to achieve is, first of all, the one that must rule in his philosophical *polis*.

## THE PROBLEM OF EDUCATION

The Socratic reflection, in the *Republic*, begins in 468a, after the question on how the soldiers must behave with themselves and with the enemies: the brave ones will be rewarded, the cowards and the ones unable to fight will have to be rejected and appointed to perform the functions of lower level. It is clear from the former step (467de) concerning the training of the young warriors and their masters that we are talking about not only the very war action but also about the tough struggle that is fundamental to achieve the authentic knowledge, to which only a few, the best ones, are meant to<sup>3</sup>. What matters, as always in Plato, is a good *techne*, that is to say an adequate professional knowledge, so that commanders to whom the young will have to obey are mature by age and experience, so to be guides and masters. This observation has not only a military-technical meaning, but an educational one the most, as it is marked using the word *paidagogous* (467d). Even the fathers of the boys submitted to a military training will have to possess not only good technical knowledge of the subject, but they will also have to be masters and teachers of their sons. Good teaching and good teachers allow boys to spread their wings and fly and, at the right time, to ride on fast and tractable horses<sup>4</sup>, making the “*the golden legacy*” (468e6) of the best men of the *polis*<sup>5</sup>, the most professionally trained and of great culture ones.

Thus, by the example of military training, a quite precise idea of general pedagogy is well defined that puts the fathers, and so the family, in the heart of the educational program, and makes them masters to do their work; that idea is also about the boys who starts studying since they are children, ac-

According to the educational pattern the Greeks called *paidomazein* (who has been taught since he was a child), that is well-known to Latins too<sup>6</sup>. The traditional teachings of music and gymnastics are added into the educational program of the young warriors (men and women), in continuity with the training of military type. So the two different and distinct forms of the Greek educational tradition, are for the first time joined in a single curriculum. This is for Plato to underline that the purpose of the education of the military class of his polis is not only the ability in the use of weapons, but mainly to give a spiritual imprint<sup>7</sup>; in this way the government has the chance to understand that the ultimate learning is the philosophical one.

The answer of Socrates to the next question about how the soldiers must behave among them recalls the rules of the Pindaric chivalrous *areté* and the traditional ethical code of the *andreia* of the '*agathos aner*, as it is clearly marked by Homer's and Hesiod's quote (468d)<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, there is another question of how the soldiers of the polis must behave with the enemies and here the Socratic discussion is more complex and wider.

## RULES FOR WAR

Everything starts from the struggles among Greeks (469B–470b), for whose struggle a very strict ethics of war is set, giving the real enmity among brothers, among people belonging to the same *ghenos* (470c1–3). This code of ethics says: 1) prevent the other Hellenes to submit other Hellenes, being careful not to become slaves of barbarians (469b8–c2); 2) it is unfair that Greeks own Greek slaves; in this way the Greeks are induced to turn to the barbarians, saving each other (469c4–7); 3) it is unfair to despoil the deads, except for their weapons (469c8–9); 4) it is unfair to despoil a corpse (469d6–7); 5) do not expose the arms taken from the Hellenes as votive offerings in temples (469e7–470a1); 6) do not devastate crops (470a5–9).

It is remarkable that the points 1 and 2 are strengthened by the invitation to fight only against the barbarians, of whom the Greeks may be enslaved<sup>9</sup>. As to the barbarians, the enemies of Greek freedom, there is a full separation, while the hostility among Hellenes is considered as the disagreement among families (470b4–7), thus the enmity within the family is called discord, the enmity with foreigner and stranger is called war (470b8–9).

The separation between Hellenes and barbarians is by nature<sup>10</sup> and you have to call it war (470c5–6), while the friendship among Greeks is by nature too and if enmity rises it is because Hellas is sick and, in this case, you must use the name of discord (470c8d1).

The emphasis on the linguistic difference “stasis-polemos” is useful to Plato to emphasize the diversity of the attitude the Greeks must have among each other and with the “others”, as there are two different “worlds” in comparison, the familiar and similar one and the stranger and the foreigner one (470b6–7). The philosopher, in this occasion, is concerned on marking the importance of the national unity of the Greek race and the Hellenic homeland, that is nourisher and mother, and where there is a native relationship and a community of cults (471a1–2); so all Greeks will have to recognize and call each other brothers, fathers and sons (471d3). If this is true, then the hatred among the Greeks is something unnatural, so they must contrast only the barbarians, that is an attitude that “now” distinguishes the relationships among the Hellenics (471b6–8)<sup>11</sup>.

If among Greeks there can only be quarrels but not war, the disagreements must respect an ethical code different from the one used against the enemies, that is to say: 1) do not destroy the opponent’s land, but, acting with the right measure, take away only the harvest of the current year (470d8–e1); 2) suddenly start the procedures for an immediate reconciliation and do not keep a permanent state of war (470e2); 3) there will be fight, but also reconciliation (471a4); 4) opponents will be kindly made them see reason, no reacting (471a6–7); 5) they will not sack the Greek land and will not burn down the houses (471a9–10); 6) they will not consider the inhabitants as enemies, whatever they are men, women or children, but the only enemies will be those responsible of the conflict created (471b1–2); 7) they will keep the hostilities until the innocents themselves will not punish the responsables of such hostilities (471b3–5).

These precise provisions regulate that kind of “disease” (470c9) that is the conflict of Hellas, extremely hateful and unacceptable (470d6). For these reasons also the guardians of the ideal state will have to stick to the rigid arrangement not to devastate the land and not to burn down the houses in the Hellenic nation (471d9–c3).

If they can respect each other and will recognize themselves in the bond of common homeland, the Greeks will have the strength to fight against their enemies, especially if women will participate actively in the operations of war, both on the battlefield and in the rears, giving the 'idea of a strong line-up, such as to frighten the enemy. In this way the Greeks are really unbeatable (471d).

## OTHER REGULATIONS

So this complex legislation about "stasis" can be considered the right medicine to cure the disease the Greek race suffers from, and it aims to the supreme good of the inner union and the harmony of Hellas, as it is expressly stated in the Book I of the *Laws* (628c). That will enable the achievement of a lasting peace among the *poleis* (628th) and so end it is good that the law-maker determines this set of laws in details (628c).

The complex comparison, in Book I of the *Laws*, between the Cretan Klinias and the Athenian on this subject, which starts at 626a, seems to be a clarification and a deepening of what stated in the *Republic*.

The starting statement, given to Klinias, that peace is just a name, because actually, each state is always at war against another State (626a) does not seem to be an adherence to the ideology of the war<sup>12</sup>, but as a statement of the status quo, the disease generated by an uncontrolled desire of possess and wealth (626b), for which it needs the right medicine and, even before, the right diagnosis.

The very diagnosis starts from noting that, from Klinias' point of view of, every well-governed state is organized to win wars. The Athenian realizes that this system also applies to relations among villages, states, families and, eventually, among man and man; in public everybody are enemies of everybody and, in private, everyone is an enemy of himself (626cd). Finally we came to the classical Platonic simile, emphasized especially in the *Republic*, between the soul of the single and the life of the state: the polis is, in big scale, the mirror of what is, in small scale, the yuc» of the Citizen<sup>13</sup>.

Since the problem of the state comes from the soul of the individual, the Athenian further deepens the level of discussion, always keeping the level of the comparison soul-State; with reference to the war everyone engages

against himself, he says that the best win, for man, is to win himself; the worst things, however, is to be won by himself (626e). There is an allusion here to the inner struggle among the different powers of the soul; when the *loghistikon*, the best part of himself, is able to dominate the other parts of the yuc», then the man has won himself; when the lower powers can get the upper hand over it is the worst part of himself to win. It is clear, in great part, within the State: when evil citizens try, with violence, to enslave all the others, then we have the worst form of the state; on the contrary, if the best ones dominate over all others, we have the state ruled with justice and the same thing goes for relationships in family (627bc)<sup>14</sup>. The convenience (pršpon) for the family and for the whole relationship is to understand that, to submit the wicked ones (tîn ponhrîn) is to be lower ( $\frac{1}{4}$ ttwn) to itself, while it is higher (kre...ttwn) if the wicked are the ones submitted (627c8-10). What if there were a judge for these brothers (¢delfo:j) belonging to the same family, which one would be the best? The one that would make the evil ones die and commanded the best to rule on their own; the one that made the best ones rule, forcing the worst ones to submit; or a third judge who, acting in an ethical dimension (prÖj ¢ret $\frac{3}{4}$ n), using a conflicting family, does not kill anyone, pacifies the family and sets laws for its future so that he grants that they are friends of each other and he would set laws not for war but for peace (627e–628a).

Similarly, the individual who governs the state must direct his efforts to the external war, rather than war that rises from his chest, and that is called sedition; nobody would ever want that an inner sedition arose and, once arisen, the hope is that it ends as soon as possible (628b).

Since the law-maker establishes the set of laws, for the best good, we cannot find it neither in war nor in stasis, but in the peace based on mutual kindness. You are not a real politician and a good law-maker if you do not state laws for war in peacetime rather than laws for peace in wartime (628de).

## GOOD LAWS FOR BROTHERHOOD

We are talking about those very same good laws in the *Republic*, that would ensure benefits for all if *politeia* arose, whose realization is possible (471e), and if that happened everything would be good inside it (471c).

A good law and good governance, based on the principles of sharing and benevolence, guarantee peace and harmony and, therefore, the overcoming of permanent conflict within the State or among brother States. The only allowed war would be against the barbarians who are strangers to these principles and do not understand them and, so, they are a threat for the *koinonia* and *eunomia*, the result of a higher level of civilization, based on freedom. Plato uses these observations to elevate to the highest level of intellectual dignity the aspiration of the Greek society to peace (*Law*. VII, 803d)<sup>15</sup>, that we can reach by educating the people; the very formation of man as builder of the state is aimed, in fact, to the entire system of the *Republic*, and it is in this perspective that, perhaps, you must read the rules of war, along with that of the *Laws*. From this point of view we can say that the Platonic speech on legislation for peace opens up to much wider perspective rather than just an attempt to «regulate violence», or «erase the conflict: the absence of boldness seems to be compatible only with the epical scenarios of a primitive golden age»<sup>16</sup>. The state of wildness within man, which shoes itself with violence and boldness, is overcome by the philosophical *paideia* built in the *Republic*, where the man and the state are mirrored each other<sup>17</sup>.

If the instinctive *pleonexia* of man will be tamed through the philosophical education, then there will be even a right *polis*, free from *stasis*. The Platonic speech has, therefore, a perspective that goes beyond the facts or tradition that time, even if it is certainly influenced by them. His goal is not to make the war less violent, but to eliminate the war from his *polis* philosophical<sup>18</sup>.

The social peace within the State and the fight against tyranny (that is against the essential natural right of the citizen) can be realized by harmonizing the life of the State to the idea of “community” used as model. We have a community when different parts – but compatible each other – make a single unity. This principle of order reflects a model of universal natural right that sets the soul, the State, the nature and the supernatural in a single proportional geometrical law.

The war, as upheaval of the principle of cosmic harmony, is therefore a violation of the essential natural right of man to the full realization of his own spiritual essence inside a political community based on principles of order and justice. The justice within a political community is achieved by persua-

sion while the order is imposed with the authority the State must exercise. The dialectic tension between persuasion and constriction has an educational function and totally defers from the tyrannical government way of rule, as the tyrant does not know the idea of justice and the idea of community, and so he cannot realize a good government. This fact leads the citizen to the rebellion against the tyrant and to the upheaval of social peace. The trick of the tyrant to keep his power and avoid civil war is to bring the war outside<sup>19</sup>.

Plato is the very first philosopher who speaks about the genesis of dialectic between civil war and outside war.

The war among States may be considered a righteous war when an outside enemy threatens the freedom of the *polis*, as freedom – from Plato’s point of view and the whole classical Greek culture point of view – is the fundamental human right that makes a man a citizen and not a slave. So, Persian wars are a good example of a high educational value and help to clarify the classic Platonic distinction between “life” and “good life”<sup>20</sup> and the connection between these two rights. The second one among them prevails on the first one because living like surviving has no real meaning; instead, the realization of human nature as similar to divinity is fundamental.

From Plato’s point of view this objective can be achieved by means of the education promoted by the State that helps the citizens to realize his essence as man. The State, therefore, realizes the natural order among citizens thus educated, that may only consist in a proportional equality of all citizens for their friendship and thus for peace. The *polis* becomes a unity and a real political community only thanks to the peace granted by that friendship.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> *Resp.* 470b, *Menex* 242cd; on the problem the essay of S. Gastaldi *La guerra della kallipolis*, in *Platone, La Repubblica*, trad. e comm. A cura di Mario Vegetti, vol. IV, Libro V, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 2001, pp. 301–334. On the concept of *stasis* H.J. Gehrke, *Stasis. Untersuchungen zu den inneren Kriegen in den griechischen Staaten des 5. und 4. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.*, München, C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1985, pp. 2–9, 208–211.
- <sup>2</sup> According to the famous definition Herodotus Hellenism is defined by membership of the same blood and the same language, from the temples, gods and sacred rites common and similar costumes, *Hdt.*, VIII, 144; hints at some of the main features of the 'EllhnikÒn also in V, 49; IX, 90.
- <sup>3</sup> «Anche i filosofi della città ideale passano attraverso una fase di addestramento militare e sono reclutati a partire dalla classe dei difensori della città...anche i difensori integrano armonicamente la loro formazione militare con la *piaideia* mu-

- sicale», G. Cambiano, *La pace in Platone e in Aristotele*, in R. Uglione (ed.), *La pace nel mondo antico*. Atti del convegno nazionale di studi. Torino 9–10–11 aprile 1990, Torino, Regione Piemonte, Assessorato alla Cultura, 1991, p. 102.
- <sup>4</sup> For transposition of these teachings, Quint. I, Pr., 27; I, V, 1.
- <sup>5</sup> On the myth of the “seed of gold”, .Resp. III 415ac.
- <sup>6</sup> Quint. I, XII, 9; H.I. Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité*, Seuil, Paris 1948, trans. it. of Umberto Massi, *Storia dell'educazione nell'antichità*, Studium, Roma 1971 (1. ed. 1950), p. 296.
- <sup>7</sup> W. Jäger, *Paideia. Die Formung des griechischen*, Berlin und Leipzig, Walter De Gruyter & Co, 1944, trans. it. of L. Emery e A. Setti, *Paideia. La formazione dell'uomo greco*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, III voll., 1988 (1. ed. 1953), new ed. it. of *Paideia* in book one and only, Milano, Bompiani, 2003, vol. II, pp. 435–436.
- <sup>8</sup> S. Gastaldi *La guerra della kallipolis*, p. 305; on the evolution of the Greek military training, J. De Romilly, *Guerre et paix entre cités*, in J. P. Vernant (ed.), *Civilisations et Sociétés 11*, Paris-La Haye, Mouton & Co, 1968, pp. 209–220.
- <sup>9</sup> The ethics of friendship Greek forces to help friends and damage enemies, Resp. II 373e ss.; Leg. I 628a ss.; cfr. H.J. Gehrke, *Die Griechen und die Rache. Ein Versuch in historischer Psychologie*, in «Saeculum», XXXVIII (1987), pp. 131 ss.
- <sup>10</sup> Pol. 262d; see M. Migliori, *Arte politica e metretica assiologica. Commentario storico-filosofico al «Politico» di Platone*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 1996, p. 59.
- <sup>11</sup> For the devastating effects of the struggle between the Greeks in the years of youth Plato, Thuc. III, 82.3 and essays of H.J. Gehrke, *Stasis*, pp. 464, 474–479 e K.J. Hölskeskamp, *La guerra e la pace*, pp. 492–493, 496, in S. Settis (ed.), *I Greci. Storia Cultura Arte Società, 2 Una storia greca, II Definizione*, Torino, Einaudi, 1997, trans. it. of Luca Soverini; C. Bearzot, Stēsij e pōletoj nel 404, in M. Sordi (ed.), *L'opposizione nel mondo antico*, contributi dell'Istituto di storia antica, vol. 26, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2000, pp. 19–36; M. Moggi, 'Stasis', 'prodosia' e 'polemos' in *Tucidide*, in M. Sordi (ed.), *Fazioni e congiure nel mondo antico*, contributi dell'Istituto di storia antica, vol. 24, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 1999, pp. 41–72.
- <sup>12</sup> In this sense, K.J. Hölskeskamp, *La guerra e la pace*, cit., p. 534.
- <sup>13</sup> N.R. Murphy, *The interpretation of Plato's Republic*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1960 (1. ed. 1951), pp. 25–44.
- <sup>14</sup> On the strength of the irrational in *stasis* and on the subordination of the *logos* to *orghè* and *thumos* also discussed Aristot. Pol, 1302a, pp. 35–36; see K. Kalimtzis, *Aristotle on Political Enmity and Disease. An Inquiry into Stasis*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2000, p. 119.

- <sup>15</sup> For a non-militaristic vision of Greek history, see Y. Garlan, *L'uomo e la guerra* (trans. it. di Carlo De Nonno), in J.P. Vernant (ed.), *L'uomo greco*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1991, pp. 56–57.
- <sup>16</sup> S. Gastaldi, *La guerra della Kallipolis*, p. 30. Also for G. Cambiano, *La pace in Platone e in Aristotele*, p. 104, «obiettivo di Platone non è tanto l'eliminazione definitiva delle guerre tra greci, con la conseguente instaurazione di una pace definitiva, tra essi, quanto l'introduzione di limiti e divieti nel grado di durezza e crudeltà».
- <sup>17</sup> W. Jäger, *Paideia*, p. 446.
- <sup>18</sup> *Law V*, 739b–740a.
- <sup>19</sup> See I. Ramelli, *La dialettica tra guerra esterna e guerra civile da Siracusa a Roma*, in M. Sordi (ed.), *Il pensiero sulla guerra nel mondo antico*, Contributi dell'Istituto di storia antica, volume ventiquattresimo, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2001, pp. 49–51.
- <sup>20</sup> *Crit.* 48b.