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The Aristotelian Criticism of the Liberal Foundations of Modern State

Abstract: The paper discusses some fundamental differences between Aristotelian and modern conceptions of the state. It focuses its attention on the early liberal thinkers, such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, and contrasts the theory of state developed by them with the classical republican ideal described by Aristotle. As I will demonstrate main differences come down to (1) distinct ideas concerning the state's origins (and especially human motivations behind establishing the state), (2) divergent convictions about the role of the state and its ethical dimension; and finally (3) different beliefs concerning basic feelings and passions which sustain existence of political community. I argue that on the basis of Stagirite's philosophy it is possible to question whether civic association described by the precursors of liberal political thought is actually the state. In conclusion, I signalize the problem of serious limitations of contemporary liberal democracies (or even their internal contradictions) resulting from their attempt to follow an ideal of an ideologically neutral state.

Keywords: *state; Aristotle; Thomas Hobbes; John Locke; liberalism; republicanism*

Studying the history of political thought is, in equal measure, a matter of historical reconstruction and an attempt to assess the vitality of certain ideas under the conditions of contemporary liberal democracies. While studying political philosophy of ancient thinkers can be (and is) fascinating and intellectually satisfying pastime, it is the attempt to evaluate the usefulness of their ideas, vocabulary and institutional arrangements for coping with contemporary problems which appears to pose the greatest challenge. The present paper is such an attempt. It harnesses political thought of Aristotle for the purpose of analysing philosophical foundations of modern liberal democracies. It argues that early liberal conception of the state developed

by Thomas Hobbes¹ and John Locke – which constitute theoretical foundations of modern thinking about political community – and the conception of classically republican thinker such as Aristotle are divergent to such a degree that they result in two completely different visions of society and politics. Moreover, as I will attempt to demonstrate, basing on the ground of the political thought of Stagirite it is even possible to question whether the modern liberal state is actually the state (or merely some subordinate association).

The ultimate purpose of the paper, however, is not to chastise liberal conception of the state but rather to identify its serious limitations, which are to some degree inherited by modern liberal democracies. It is an open question – which I am not able to address comprehensively in this article – whether classical ideas presented by Aristotle could be used as means of overcoming those limitations.

Politics as a way of life

In *Politics*, Aristotle gives many definitions of the state, one of which seems central to his entire conception. Namely, the Stagirite asserts that the state (a city – *polis*)

is not a partnership in a location and for the sake of not committing injustice against each other and of transacting business. These things must necessarily be present if there is to be a city, but not even when all of them are present is it yet a city, but [the city is] the partnership in living well both of households and families for the sake of a complete and self-sufficient life (Aristotle, 2013, 1280b34–39).

The quoted definition contrasts starkly with the modern conception of the state, developed by the precursors of liberalism. According to Hobbes (1965), when men establish a state, or commonwealth, the objective is “the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby” (sec. XVII.1, p. 128). Aristotle uses the expression “living well” while the author of *Leviathan* mentions a “contented

¹ I am aware of the fact that classifying Hobbes as a liberal thinker is quite problematic as the logic presented in *Leviathan* seems to support some form of an absolute monarchy rather than limited government with parliament at its centre. Nevertheless, I tend to agree with those authors who claim that at least three elements of Hobbes’ political philosophy make him a modern forefather of liberalism. Those elements are: uncompromising individualism (and resulting individual rights); egalitarian affirmation of equality of all men in the state of nature; and, finally, the conception of a social contract – being the act of the “foundation” of state and political authority. For more on Hobbes’ affinity to liberalism see for example Gray, 1994, pp. 20–22; Macpherson, 2011, pp. 1–2; Oakeshott, 1975, p. 63; Rau, 2000, p. 11; Strauss, 1965, p. 13, 1969, pp. 167–168.

life”; however, it would be a mistake to consider this a sign of convergence in thought between them. Let us recall that, in Hobbes’s opinion, in the state of nature the life of man – who constantly fears the “danger of violent death” – is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (Hobbes, 1965, Chapter XIII.9, p. 97). Merely rising above that state makes a person much happier. In Hobbes’s philosophy, establishing a state – which is synonymous with establishing relatively strong guarantees of the purely physical survival of individual persons – is, from the individual’s point of view, actually the target point, beyond which the role of state authority becomes limited to administration, controlling the observance of laws and fulfilling the judicial function. After the social contract has been concluded, only the Leviathan deals with politics (reduced to the above-mentioned functions). The citizens’ role is basically limited to mutual peaceful coexistence – based on respect for the previously adopted laws and procedures (the observance of which is enforced by the Leviathan, armed with a sword). In contrast, from Aristotle’s standpoint political partnership “must be regarded (...) as being for the sake of noble actions, not [merely – M. G.] for the sake of living together” (Aristotle, 2013, 1281a4–5).² The state’s purpose is, namely, “living well”, while everything else (e.g. safety, respect for private property, etc.) merely constitutes means to that end (Aristotle, 2013, 1281a1–2).

The famous “lowering of standards” conducted – according to Leo Straus – by modern thinkers (particularly Machiavelli and Hobbes) is particularly visible in the dimension described above. In liberal thought regarding the state, the state’s role, so to speak, ends at the point where for republican thinkers it just begins. For Aristotle, the establishment of a *polis* opens the road towards man’s full self-realization – in other words, towards realization of the potential contained in his nature (self-realization which is only possible in a community, a state of coexistence with other people). By safeguarding its citizens from mutual harm, facilitating the exchange of goods and creating conditions for the self-sufficiency of the political community, the *polis* allows its members to realize their humanity, creating a framework for man’s full development as a citizen, and simultaneously for the development of humans as rational and inquisitive beings – ones who seek their own way of life and self-fulfilment (*Eudaimonia*).³

² A little earlier, the philosopher also writes that although the city comes into being “for the sake of living, it exists for the sake of living well” (Aristotle, 2013, 1252b32)

³ In this context, we should not forget the words *gnōthi sauton* (“know thyself!”), the maxim inscribed over the entrance to the Temple of Apollo at Delphi and often quoted by Socrates in Plato’s dialogues. In his philosophy, Socrates advocated knowing oneself, understanding one’s self and what is good for it, as a necessary prerequisite to a happy life. Hannah Arendt expresses the opinion that the meaning of that maxim was not purely philosophical – it also had a very clear political significance (Arendt, 2005, pp. 18–19). Paweł Śpiewak, in turn, notes that “the political ideal is

Thus, the state is a “partnership in living well”, but such a life involves much more than mere biological existence. For the ancient Greeks, life was not only a physiological fact, but a sort of challenge: one’s goal was not merely to live, but to live one’s life well. Life was too precious and too short – especially in ancient times, marked by almost unceasing wars (see e.g. Kubiak, 2003, pp. 12, 386), to treat it with the lightness characteristic for our modern civilization of abundance, dominated by pop culture. As Stanisław Łojek explains, for the Greeks the value of human life “was closely related to its (measurable) quality – which depended on actual achievements. They did not consider the mere fact of existence a sufficient justification for ethical and political relations of equality” (Łojek, 2009, p. 178). Rather they understood civic community as something more than merely peaceful and comfortable coexistence with others (under an umbrella of safety provided by a strict Leviathan). Rather, it was a certain way of life shared by community members: focused on development, self-improvement, on searching for harmony and happiness.

In this regard, the chasm that separates the modern theory of the state developed by liberal philosophers from the classical republican vision appears bottomless. According to the former, the state is created primarily to protect the lives of individuals who enter a social contract. In this context, “life” means life in the purely biological sense (and since the publication of John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government* life understood in such a manner is presented as one of the fundamental and innate rights of every human being). Protecting that life becomes the basic objective of state authority. Searching for universal traits of human nature, on which he could build a modern science about the state, Hobbes found them in the form of a common desire to survive and an instinct for self-preservation, which he considers characteristic for every human being. Convinced about the universal character of that predisposition, he came to the conclusion about the essential similarity, and consequently the equality, of humans in the state of nature. Hence, individuals who enter into a social contract do so from equal positions – as people at risk of death, who also constitute a threat to each other and flee from that threat, seeking shelter under the Leviathan’s wings. Their status as citizens is a direct consequence of their equality in the state of nature.

However, the opposite is true in the ancient tradition, in which a citizen’s status was based precisely on the fundamental distinction (and thereby the difference) between

the ideal of self-knowledge for each of us. The aim is to allow people to recognize their own good and their own knowledge” (“Po co nam grecka filozofia polityki albo o cnocie doskonałości,” 2008, p. 332). Following the example of Socrates, Cicero, too, will perceive philosophy as the ability to know oneself (See Cicero, 1842, pp. 68–69). Many centuries later a postulate that self-knowledge is the foundation of both political and individual virtue was also voiced by Immanuel Kant (See Williams, 1997, p. 215).

free people and slaves. Obviously, only the former could be citizens, but their condition was the effect of something more than simply the legal status of freedom (as opposed to subordination). It is impossible to understand the ancient Greeks' conception of citizenship without recalling that a citizen's basic duty was military service and defending one's homeland. Moreover, one must remember that such fighting was not merely hypothetical; it was an everyday occurrence, something known to almost every citizen from first-hand experience. Thus, only a person ready to bear the (very real) risk of dying on the battlefield could be a citizen. As Łojek explains,

the criteria of *ancient inequality* echo the criteria of *modern equality*. The ancients thought that our life only deserves to be called a good and, we may add, truly human life when we rise *above* that which, according to modern thinkers, makes all human beings equal in value. (...) The willingness and ability to sacrifice one's own life for the sake of purposes higher than mere survival 'elevated' some individuals above others. Thus, in the Greeks' minds, the natural and obvious fact that everybody is equal in the face of death was not an equalizing factor; on the contrary, it was the main criterion for a radical division between higher- and lower-quality persons. (Łojek, 2009, p. 177)

Furthermore, defending the *polis* was – as Pericles's funeral oration attests – something more than merely defending homes or property. It was, first of all, the defence of a certain way of life – the life of free people (and proud of the fact that they are free!). Death on the battlefield was considered a price worth paying for the privileged status of a free man (a status which, we may add, was absolutely unknown and unattainable for most of the population in the ancient world).

The giant re-evaluation which has taken place in modernity as regards the attitude towards human life means that the way of thinking described above may seem extremely anachronistic and downright dangerous.⁴ Bearing that in mind, it is worth to consider whether this aforementioned, ancient way of thinking about life, sacrifice and citizenship can serve as a source of inspiration for contemporaries. Presently, at the beginning of the 21st century, we inhabit a continent where peace (with some minor exceptions) has reigned for the last 70 years, the level of general prosperity (regardless of huge gaps in the level of individual income) is unprecedentedly high and numerous declarations of human and civil rights—multiplying since World War II—have delivered a relatively efficient protective umbrella. Under these conditions,

⁴ In the context of events associated with the Smoleńsk tragedy, Agata Bielik-Robson has deplored the fact that a fascination with “thanapolitics” has been revived in Polish thought (Bielik-Robson, 2010).

perhaps we are unable to comprehend the full value of freedom and of the price that sometimes has to be paid for its preservation⁵.

The realities of the ancient world (in which the Aristotelian paradigm of politics shaped itself) were very different: war and the lack of freedom were common, whereas freedom and peace were an extremely rare occurrence. Hence, the ancient Greeks did not perceive life as such as the highest and indisputable value. Rather, freedom and honour held such value for them. Someone who was not prepared to give up his life in order to attain (or save) those values proved that he is unworthy of them. Such unwillingness was proof of a slave's nature – or, more precisely, a slavish attachment to purely biological existence. As Hannah Arendt explains: “To leave the household, originally in order to embark upon some adventure and glorious enterprise and later simply to devote one's life to the affairs of the city, demanded courage because only in the household was one primarily concerned with one's own life and survival. Whoever entered the political realm had first to be ready to risk his life, and too great a love for life obstructed freedom, was a sure sign of slavishness. Courage therefore became the political virtue *par excellence*, and only those men who possessed it could be admitted to a fellowship that was political in content and purpose and thereby transcended the mere togetherness imposed on all – slaves, barbarians, and Greeks alike – through the urgencies of life” (Arendt, 1998, p. 36).

It should be remembered that the classical view of politics as a realm of liberty had many dimensions; a key one of these was the perception of politics as a release from the realm of necessity. In this approach, politics is a space of free creation, where human actions – unconditioned by purely biological needs – imprint a lasting mark upon reality (this is probably how we should understand Cicero's statement that politics is a field where “human virtue” resembles “the divine powers” (Cicero, 1841, p. 151; also see: pp. 176, 254); here, the human being would be a demiurge of sorts). We must remember that for Aristotle, politics was a branch of practical knowledge – in other words, of knowledge dealing with things which *may be different* (than they are). Thus, unlike the sphere of necessity, politics is an area of rational creation. Political life is governed by the rules of purpose, not necessity. Its goal is the realization of a rational potential. Therefore, it is political action that gives humans a status radically different from that of animals; they break out of the realm of necessity, ruled by biological factors, and rationally codetermine the surrounding world – which makes them truly free beings. Accordingly, the realm of politics is an area – in Arendt's words – “where we can be truly free, that is, neither driven by ourselves nor dependent on the givens

⁵ Is this not one of the dangers that Jose Ortega y Gasset warned about in *The Revolt of the Masses*?

of material existence. Freedom exists only in the unique intermediary space of politics” (Arendt, 2005, p. 95).⁶ It is this space that gives human life an additional dimension (*bios politikos*) besides the purely biological one. However, achieving that state requires a specific mental disposition, which is by no means present in all people to the same degree. Therefore, only a person capable of rising above the purely biological desire to survive, to preserve one’s own life (or – in Hobbes’s terms – above the fear of violent death) could be a free man, a citizen. To become a citizen, one had to overcome the limitations of natural, biological determinism and live as a free man should, in defiance of one’s animal nature.

An association based on fear versus community based on friendship

The difference in perception of the state’s nature and role by Aristotle and the precursors of liberalism is also visible in deliberations on human motivation guiding the establishment of the state. Let us recall that according to Hobbes, this motivation consists in the fear of a violent death – an emotion that constantly haunts men in the state of nature. “The only way to erect such a Common Power, as may be able to defend them from the invasion of foreigners, and the injuries of one another – says the author of *Leviathan* – is, to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, that may reduce all their Wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will” (Hobbes, 1965, Chapter XVII.14, p. 131). It is also significant that, in Hobbes’s opinion, the sword-wielding state authority is the *only* solution to the dilemma – characteristic for the state of nature – of a war that sets all against all. Consequently, state authority becomes the only tool that can enforce the peaceful coexistence of human beings. The binding force of the civil union is in this perspective fear (fear, let us add, of one another)⁷.

From the Aristotelian perspective, the intellectual and psychological construction on which Hobbes bases his theory of the state is clearly despotic in character. Let us recall that republican tradition draws a stark contrast between such pairs of concepts as:

⁶ Slightly further on, the author of *The Human Condition* writes: “A necessity—whether in the sense of an undeniable need of human nature, like hunger or love, or whether in the sense of an indispensable institution of human communal life—is precisely what politics is not. In fact, it [politics – M. G.] begins where the realm of material necessities and physical brute force end (Arendt, 2005, p. 119. Also see pp. 17, 122).

⁷ The entirety of Hobbes’s reflections leaves no doubt that fear is not only the reason behind establishing the state, but also the reason why citizens obey state authority, once such authority has been established (See Hobbes, 1965, Chapter XVII.2, p. 128). Precisely this thread of thought prompted Judith Shklar to develop her conception of “liberalism of fear” (See Shklar, 1998).

republic – tyranny; freedom – serfdom; and finally, virtue – fear. It is no coincidence that in his typology of governments, Montesquieu mentions virtue as the principle of the republican government. It is also no coincidence that he contrasted this pair of values with tyranny, the main principle of which is fear. A despotic regime, being the antithesis of freedom, not only enslaves people but also has a ruinous effect on their character, as it supplants virtue with the most base of feelings – constant fear. A despot deprives citizens of political subjectivity, whereas fear degrades man, making him resemble a slave whose life depends entirely on the will of the master. Montesquieu describes a man living under despotic rule as “a creature that obeys a creature that wants. (...) Man’s portion, like beasts’, is instinct, obedience, and chastisement” (Montesquieu, 2006, bk. III.10, p. 29). This situation vividly resembles Hobbes’s vision of the state, in which fear-driven individuals first decide to establish a sovereign ruler and entrust themselves to his care, and subsequently obey him for fear of criminal sanction.

Although many modern liberals may take offense at this conclusion, in the light of the classical republican approach the theoretical construct presented by Hobbes bears all the hallmarks of a despotic regime. Nowhere was the opposition between fear and virtue, despotism and freedom so strongly emphasized as in classical political thought, in which the situation of subjects in a despotic state was explicitly compared to the situation of a slave. In this case, the common denominator is not only a lack of autonomy, but precisely fear⁸.

Where Hobbes proposes relying on a sword and fear, Aristotle focuses on friendship, which “seems (...) to hold states together” (Aristotle, 2009, 1155a22–23; also see: Aristotle, 2013, 1295b26). For this reason, the Stagirite recommends that legislators promote friendship, without which justice cannot be achieved in the state; and, as we remember from *Politics*, justice is one of the basic principles of the state

⁸ Let us recall that Plato’s and Aristotle’s disquisitions – slightly shocking for the modern reader – about “natural” slavery had nothing to do with physical characteristics (such as race or sex), but were based on the conviction that the defining feature of a slave is fear of death (together with a strong attachment to physical existence); as an emotion, this fear is stronger than the love of freedom. For an ancient Greek or Roman citizen it was absolutely obvious that someone who truly loves freedom would sooner commit suicide than agree to live in slavery. On the other hand, the image that emerges from Hobbes’s reflections on the compatibility of the subject’s freedom with the sovereign’s unlimited power carries all the hallmarks of bondage and is akin to tyranny, rather than to a regime based on citizens’ freedom and subjectivity (See Hobbes, 1965, Chapters XXI.7–8, p. 163–164). For this, he was criticized both by John Locke and by Jean Jacques Rousseau.

(Aristotle, 2013, 1253a38–40)⁹. All this leads Aristotle to conclude that “it is the same people that are good men and are friends” (Aristotle, 2009, 1155a31–32).

Thus, the community of citizens is – in Aristotelian perspective – a community of friends, who do not harm one another not because they fear punishment (such behaviour is typical for a slave rather than a free man), but because of a feeling of mutual friendliness (or actual comradesly love). While in Hobbes’s vision of the state the citizens are united by a common fear of returning to the state of nature, a war of all against all, from Aristotle’s perspective the binding force of the state is friendship. In its perfect form friendship is – according to the author of *Politics* – a bond that connects people not because of any utilitarian purpose (or the benefit that it brings), but because of the desire to coexist with other persons guided by the ideal of self-improvement and the pursuit of virtue – the ideal of living well:

Perfect friendship is the friendship of men who are good, and alike in virtue; for these wish well alike to each other (...) and they are good themselves. Now those who wish well to their friends for their sake are most truly friends; for they do this by reason of own nature and not incidentally; therefore their friendship lasts as long as they are good – and goodness is an enduring thing. (Aristotle, 2009, 1156b12–13)

Significantly, the philosopher is perfectly aware of the fact that a community thus understood is never quick to develop. On the contrary, it requires time. Before people can become friends, they have to get to know each other and convince one another that they are worthy of friendship. Therefore, it is not a question of individual will or the readiness to join a civic association – as is the case in contractualist liberal tradition. Rather, the state bond is organic in character. It grows gradually, as the community of free individuals transforms into a community of friends. This requires time, since “a wish for friendship may arise quickly, but friendship does not” (Aristotle, 2009, 1156b31–32).

It is both telling and sad that the procedural theory of state and law which dominates in modern liberalism has led to the loss of this classical republican understanding of the political community as a community of friends; instead, it places emphasis on legal rules and procedures as the basic means for regulating mutual relations between human beings.

⁹ “When men are friends they have no need of justice, while when they are just they need friendship as well, and the truest form of justice is thought to be a friendly quality” (Aristotle, 2009, 1155a26–29).

Civic education

Fundamentally important in the context presented above is the question whether the classical civic ideal can be realized when civic education is lacking. Friendship can only develop under conditions of a certain community of beliefs; beliefs regarding fundamental issues. In Arendt's words, friendship consists largely in

talking about something that the friends have in common. By talking about what is between them, it becomes ever more common to them. It gains not only its specific articulateness, but develops and expands and finally, in the course of time and life, begins to constitute a little world of its own" (Arendt, 2005, p. 16).

This certainly does not mean that friends cannot differ in many aspects and represent different standpoints. Quite the opposite. We have all argued with our friends at one time or another, and yet such arguing does not spell the end of the friendship (in some cases the friendship actually becomes stronger). This is because friendship is based on the principle of a mutual desire to spend time with one another. This is precisely how we should understand Aristotle's statement that the state (city) is a partnership in living. It encompasses people linked by a feeling of closeness (a certain civic intimacy) as well as a common desire to live in a specific way. To quote Arendt's words once more, a friend

understands how and in what specific articulateness the common world appears to the other, who as a person is forever unequal or different. This kind of understanding – seeing the world (...) from the other fellow's point of view – is the political kind of insight *par excellence* (Arendt, 2005, p. 18).

This far, the republican conception of the state as a community based on friendship is definitely not at odds (at least not as much as it is often claimed) with the concept of pluralism, which belongs in the liberal vocabulary. It does not exclude a difference of beliefs, interests or opinions. Polemicizing with well-known fragments of Plato's *Republic* – dealing with the community of assets, women and children – Aristotle argued that the essence of a state community lies in the fact that it is composed of a large number of different parts¹⁰. However, precisely because all human beings naturally differ from each other, a state which makes the equality of all citizens its

¹⁰ "For the city is in its nature a sort of multitude". Moreover: "the city is made up not only of a number of human beings, but also of human beings differing in kind: a city does not arise from persons who are similar" (Aristotle, 2013, 1261a17–25. Also see 1274b35, 1289b25–26, 1290b24 et seq.).

political principle must be based on friendship. Only friendship enables us to build a common world “in which no rulership is needed” (Arendt, 2005, p. 18)¹¹; the world of a civic association.

For ancient thinkers it was an undisputed issue that the standards of this specifically republican lifestyle should be passed on to new generations of citizens through education (largely practical in character), which leads to internalization of the values shared by community members and of specific civic virtues. Aristotle considered this issue so important that he viewed it as one of the key points of the state’s definition: “virtue must be a care for every city, or at least every one to which the term applies truly and not merely in a manner of speaking.” Otherwise, the Stagirite continues,

the partnership becomes an alliance which differs from others – from [alliances of] remote allies – only by location. And law becomes a contract and [...] a guarantor among one another of the just things, but not the sort of thing to make the citizens good and just” (Aristotle, 2013, 1280b8–14).

In other words, the difference between a political community and an alliance concerns something much more significant than merely spatial conditions. It is substantial in character. The binding force of the former is virtue, and its aim is sharing a common life (which in turn, as we emphasized earlier, should be focused on self-improvement). On the other hand, an alliance is purely utilitarian in character. Its only purpose is to achieve a specific, measurable political (or military, economic etc.) goal. Hence, the difference between them is fundamental. Once again, let us recall Aristotle’s assertion that the state is not

a partnership in a location and for the sake of not committing injustice against each other and of transacting business. These things must necessarily be present if there is to be a city, but not even when all of them are present is it yet a city, but [the city is] the partnership in living well both of households and families for the sake of a complete and self-sufficient life (Aristotle, 2013, 1280b34–39).

It is clear that in the context of ancient political thought, the modern, liberal conception of the state – restricting its role to protecting each citizen’s basic rights and enabling them to satisfy their desires – is extremely problematic. We can safely venture to say that in Aristotle’s eyes, such a state would not merit that name, since the essence of the state is something deeper than merely providing safety and creating conditions which facilitate the exchange of goods. Life in a *polis* was organized around

¹¹ Arendt is, of course, referring to relations of permanent subordination, which are typical for non-republican forms of government, such as monarchy or tyranny.

a common goal: the pursuit of excellence. It was a life lived within the confines of a certain philosophical and ethical horizon which defined the way of understanding what separates a human from other living beings and what the proper relationship should be between free and equal people. Aristotle, like dozens of philosophers after him, declared that the natural goal of every human being is pursuing happiness. However, one statement clearly distinguishes his philosophy from the heritage of most modern thinkers: the assertion that “happiness is the actualization and complete practice of virtue” (Aristotle, 2013, 1332a9–10). Thus, virtue is both a road to happiness and happiness in itself. It is a necessary prerequisite for achieving happiness (“happiness cannot be present apart from virtue”¹²) and simultaneously represents its highest manifestation. It is a goal and a reward in itself. If this is in fact true, we obtain the answer to the question why, of existing forms of government, the republic is the best one: “this is the one with which the city would be happy above all” (Aristotle, 2013, 1328b35–36). Precisely this is a distinguishing feature of the *politeia* – a form of government that is oriented towards the common good.

The Aristotelian conception of the state assumes that the bond between citizens consists in something much stronger and more fundamental than voluntary, rational agreement. A civic relationship is not merely a network based on compromise between independent individuals. The bond which unites citizens is a moral one, based on virtue. The citizens of a state are not united merely by common interests, but by a certain fundamental agreement regarding the highest values. This agreement, in turn, can only be maintained by means of educational practices, repeatedly undertaken within the community.

The state’s educational function is therefore one of its chief tasks (see Aristotle, 2013, 1337a) and simultaneously a defining criterion. A state which does not fulfil that function and only realizes others (such as collective defence, maintaining internal order or creating conditions that foster economic growth) does not actually deserve to be called a state. It is no different from “a partnership agreement in a trade of pepper and coffee”, as Edmund Burke derisively wrote¹³. Strikingly, although Aristotle’s

¹² “Happiness cannot be present apart from virtue” (Aristotle, 2013, 1328b37).

¹³ Burke’s thought is worth quoting in full, since it constitutes a polemic with contractualism that is highly convergent with the Aristotelian conception of the state, even though it was formulated under completely different historical, social and political conditions: “Society is indeed a contract. Subordinate contracts for objects of mere occasional interest may be dissolved at pleasure – but the state ought not to be considered as nothing better than a partnership agreement in a trade of pepper and coffee, calico or tobacco, or some other such low concern, to be taken up for a little temporary interest, and to be dissolved by the fancy of the parties. It is to be looked on with other reverence; because it is not a partnership in things subservient only to the gross animal existence of a temporary

treatise was written more than a thousand years earlier, the Stagirite's reflections upon the essence of the state very accurately anticipate the way of thinking initiated by Hobbes in *Leviathan* and creatively developed by Locke in his *Second Treatise of Government*. From the outset, liberal philosophy gives the state a purely utilitarian character, reducing its functions to guaranteeing the safety of its citizens, protection of private property, impartial settlement of disputes, ensuring compliance with the law and punishing offenders (see Locke, 1824, bk. II, chapter IX, §123, p. 411 et seq.); simultaneously, however, it places strict limits on the competences of state authority, so that they do not extend beyond the above-mentioned functions. However, as Aristotle emphasizes, the state is not established “for the sake of the necessary things”, but rather “for the sake of what is noble” (Aristotle, 2013, 1291a17–18). This goal becomes realized through citizens' lives and actions. Thus, the state should ultimately be viewed as a community established “for the sake of a life that is the best possible” (Aristotle, 2013, 1328a36).

Such a vision is in obvious conflict with the institutional-procedural model, which dominates in the modern theory of democracy (and which is largely a product of political philosophy of liberalism). This model reduces the state to a set of institutions and procedures. From this perspective, the legitimacy of decisions made by the state's authorities is treated as equivalent to their legality (i.e. compliance with procedures adopted earlier), instead of – as is the case in republican tradition – being identified with concern for the common good. Furthermore, in this model the state does not need to worry about promoting civic virtues – it only has to guard the procedures established through a social contract and guarantee that laws are executed. According to the advocates of the liberal model, the effective functioning of state structures and the success of society do not depend on citizens' characters; they are actually deliberately decoupled from those characters. Well-designed institutions and procedures are in fact a way to enforce appropriate behaviour – both on the part of citizens and on the part of the authorities.

However, advocates of the procedural model of democracy overlook the existence of substantial convergence (a kind of feedback) between the citizens' character and the institutions which constitute the state's government, as well as the organization of those institutions and the relations between them. State functions are not exercised by soulless robots, but by people of flesh and blood, while procedures and legal

and perishable nature. It is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born” (Burke, 1999, pp. 192–193).

standards do not apply automatically, without human agency. This relationship has been identified (and the conclusions drawn from it have been described) by at least few ancient thinkers. Plato was possibly the first to present the conception of a close relationship between the regime and the citizens' nature in his proposed typology of regimes – suggesting that each of them is based on the dominant passion that permeates the citizens' personality and codetermines their spiritual structure (Plato, 1991, 544d et seq.)¹⁴. Aristotle presented the issue in the same manner, noting that the essence of civic virtues (and, by extension, the very notion of citizenship) depend on the given regime¹⁵.

Conclusions

If the observations made by aforementioned philosophers are accurate, they have momentous consequences for all who are preoccupied with the condition of contemporary liberal democracies. Namely, the durability and effectiveness of liberal democratic institutions depend – to a degree that it is difficult to assess, but cannot be overlooked – on the citizens' character. Therefore the ability of contemporary liberal thought to identify a catalogue of specifically liberal and democratic virtues – as well as their cultivation – should be one of the tasks of the modern liberal state. It seems that despite numerous reservations (stemming from the attachment to the notion of an ideologically neutral state), the above-mentioned need is beginning to dawn in the mind of a growing number of theoreticians of liberalism – as evidenced by the rehabilitation of the category of civic virtues in liberal philosophy, which has been taking place over the last three decades (See Berkowitz, 1999; Galston, 1991; Macedo, 1991, 1992). This fact suggests that regardless of all significant differences and discrepancies between liberalism and republicanism discussed above, both traditions of thinking about the state and politics also share certain important elements and ideas (Gajek, 2016). However, a detailed discussion of such similarities transcend the scope of this paper.

¹⁴ These would be, respectively, honor and ambition in timocracy; greed in oligarchy; love of freedom (in this case, taking a strongly anarchic form) in democracy.

¹⁵ “Since there are several regimes, there must necessarily be several kinds of citizen” (Aristotle, 2013, 1278a15–16). A little earlier he writes: “the virtue of the citizen must necessarily be with a view to the regime” (Aristotle, 2013, 1276b30–31). At this point, it is worthwhile to recall the manner in which a similar idea was presented earlier by Plato: “it is necessary that there also be as many forms of human characters as there are forms of regimes” (Plato, 1991, 544d); “if there are five arrangements of cities, there would also be five for the soul of private men” (Plato, 1991, 544e).

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