

THE IDEA OF “PHILOSOPHY-AS-A-WAY-OF-LIFE” IN PLATO’S DIALOGS

Prof. Dr. Oleg Bazaluk

Guangdong University of Petrochemical Technology (China)

Abstract. Werner Jaeger argued that Plato was perhaps the first to use the word mould, *πλάττινν*, for the act. It follows from Plato’s philosophy that the arete is unable to independently free itself from hiddenness and overcome the boundaries of the physical world to master the “human sophia.” Plato’s philosophy creates a recognizable image of political education: education as the moulding of a certain “correctness of the gaze” on the image of the highest idea. The moulding power of the transcendental ideal is used to establish the focus and limits of self-realization. A specific discourse and way of life are formed that provides the mastering of the “human sophia.” We have designated the method of achieving “human sophia” with the metaphor “philosophy-as-a-way-of-life.”

Keywords: Plato; human sophia; phronesis; political education; psyche

Introduction

In the early period of ancient Greek history, the cultural ideal was the image of the warrior-hero, whose feats were equated to the feats of the gods. Namely, that kind of image was glorified by Homer, Pindar, Aeschylus, and other Greek poets. Paideia of that period inspired the new generations of the Greeks to develop the vital factor of the warrior’s arete – to *καλόν*, *the Beautiful as a determinant ideal*. Plato wrote, “The good/beautiful things [are] difficult [to attain]” (*χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ*) (Plato 1978a, 4.435c; Plato 1903c: 304e). Plato clarified the meanings of the “kalos,” subordinating them to the meanings of the “agathos.” “All that is agathos is kalos (*ἀγαθὸν καλόν*), and the kalos is not excessive (*καλὸν οὐκ ἄμετρον*)” (Plato 1978b, 87c). The warrior’s kalos (*καλόν*) meant his body’s physical perfection, which allowed the warrior to become more strong, resilient, agile, and skillful. The warrior’s kalos discovered the possibility to win on the battlefield, skills, and valour to ensure military pre-eminence of the troops. The cultural ideal “imitation of a hero” embodied the experience of being of previous generations. It set the ontological orientation and limits of possibilities in the period of early Greece: to achieve political, economic, and cultural preferences by means of combat capability of the troops.

In the classical period of ancient Greek culture, the ideal of physical power gave way to the ideal of power of knowledge, sophia (σοφία) (Kharkovshchenko 2019). The noun “sophia” (σοφία, the adjective - sophos (σοφός)) was understood by Plato as “to bind (ἐφάπτεσθαι) the carrying (φορᾶς)” (φορᾶς ἐφάπτεσθαι) (Plato 1995c, 412b; Sodomora & Yerchenko 2021). The “carrying” (φορᾶς) are the divine qualities of Hephaestus and Athena, stolen (κλέπτει) by Prometheus especially for humans (Plato 1903a, 321d). Plato opposed the sophia to the ignorance (αμάθεια) (Plato 1903a, 360d), and the main feature of Socrates was “human sophia” (ἄνθρωπινή σοφία) (Plato 1995a, 20d), perhaps even a mega sophia (Plato 1995a: 20e), which he possessed. The term “sophia” was used to combine the divine qualities of Metis (Μῆτις) and Athena (Ἀθηνᾶ) available to man (Toporov 2012; Kharkovshchenko 2019). Werner Jaeger wrote that during this period, “The Greek trinity of poet, statesman, and sage (ποιητής, πολιτικός, σοφός) embodied the nation’s highest ideal of leadership” (Jaeger 1946, xxvi). Plato’s ideal of paideia was the caste of philosophers-rulers who, in search of wisdom, comprehended the greatness of the Kingdom of Heaven in order to build its likeness on Earth. New knowledge and technology allowed the Greeks to discover the source of human power, which greatly exceeded the power of the warrior’s trained body. The Greeks revealed the power of reason to civilization, which they called “sophia.”

The “human sophia” (ἄνθρωπινή σοφία)

Julia Annas wrote, “Plato is unique among ancient philosophers in holding it important for everyone to have the right beliefs about God (or the gods) and for these beliefs prominently to include the belief that God is responsible only for good, not for evil” (Annas 2002, 79). Plato claimed the philosophy as the only possible way to overcome the boundaries of the physical world to master the “human sophia” (ἄνθρωπινή σοφία) for its rational use, *phronesis*.

The term “phronesis” is derived from the verb phroneo (φρονέω, phronéō) and was used by Plato to mean “to act on the scale of the immortals and the Gods” (φρονεῖν μὲν ἄθάνατα καὶ θεῖα) (Plato 1978b, 90c). Plato emphasized the paramount importance of phronesis (Plato 1995d, 176b), i.e., the use of divine qualities to create what is called “kalos” and “brought to perfection” (ἀπεργαζομένης) (Plato 1995c, 416d). In Apology, Socrates took credit for the care (ἐπιμεληθείη) of the highest agathos (βέλτιστος) and phronesis (φρονιμώτατος) (Plato 1995a, 36c).

Plato proved in the “Republic”:

1. The inability of the people (demos) to independently master the “human sophia” and ensure a meaningful presence. Only philosophers could provide justice: “either philosophers become kings” (ἢ οἱ φιλόσοφοι βασιλεύσωσιν ἐ) (Plato 1978a, 5.473c)

2. The transformative power of the philosophy, which acted as the guide into the transcendence, disclosed and explained its concealment. Philosophy and its guides extracted the arete potency of the students from hiddenness (*from lack of education*, ἀπαιδευσία), and gave it a man-made image formation in likeness, i.e., *education* (παιδεία). “We shall require them (*philosophers* – O.B.) to turn upwards the vision of their psyches (ψυχῆς) and fix their gaze on that which sheds light on all, and when they have thus beheld the agathos itself (ἀγαθὸν αὐτό) they shall use it as a pattern (παραδείγματι) for the right ordering of the pólin (πόλιν, causative singular of πόλις, the State) and the citizens (ιδιώτας) and themselves throughout the remainder of their lives” (Plato 1978a, 7.540 a-b).

3. The power of education, comparable to the qualities of sophia. The education established the reality of transcendence and helped to master the “human sophia.” “When philosophers have beheld the agathos itself they shall use it as a paradigm for the right ordering of the state and the citizens” (καὶ ἰδόντας τὸ ἀγαθὸν αὐτό, παραδείγματι χρωμένους ἐκείνῳ, καὶ πόλιν καὶ ιδιώτας) (Plato 1978a, 7.540a).

The “human sophia” comes within reach during the transformation of the arete potency into the meaningful presence of psyche or, equivalently, during the arete liberation (Plato 1978a, 4.427e-4.443e). Plato considers the etymology of the terms “psyche” (ψυχή, genitive ψυχῆς) and “arete” (ἀρετή) in the dialogue “Cratylus” (Plato 1995c, 399d-400b; 415d-e). Studies of the psyche by Plato were aimed at affirming two points of view: (1) the psyche is immortal (ἀθάνατος ἂν ἡ ψυχὴ εἴη) (Plato 1903b, 86b) and its nature is different from the nature of the body (Plato 1995b, 115c-116a; Plato 1901b, 245c-249d). (2) Knowledge (ἐπιστήμη, emistema) is stored in the psyche, therefore, to seek for something (ζητεῖν ἄρα) and to know (τὸ μανθάνειν), in general, was called “reminiscence” (anamnesis, ἀνάμνησις) (Plato 1903b, 81d). Arete was explored by Plato as the essence of the psyche (Plato 1901a, 209a), “the flow of the agathos psychís” (ῥοὴν τῆς ἀγαθῆς ψυχῆς) (Plato 1995c, 415d). On the way to the agathos and sophos, the harmony of psyche or the equilibrium of its key *arete* was achieved. Plato distinguished four arete: temperance (σωφροσύνη, sōphrosynē), justice (δικαιοσύνη, dikaiosynē), courage (ἀνδρεία, andreia) and phronesis (φρόνησις) as the supreme arete (Plato 1978a, 4.427e-4.43c; Plato 1903b, 70a-81b). Therefore, philosophy not only liberated psyche from the flesh, but also *cured* it from anxiety, fear, and tension (Eliopoulos 2019). It opened to the psyche a view of the transcendental being, *the idea of agathos*. Plotinus compared the movement to the supreme arete with the carving of a statue from a block of marble, in fact, equating it to *art* (Plotinus, *The Six Enneads*, I, 6, 9).

We have designated the method of achieving “human sophia” with the metaphor “philosophy-as-a-way-of-life” (Hadot 2005). It involved two stages:

1. The mastering of the qualities of “human sophia” (“ἄνθρωπίνη σοφία”) (Plato 1995a, 22a-22d).

2. The use of agathos moulding power (phronesis) (Bazaluk 2021).

At the first stage, the students chose scholarchs and overcame the boundaries of the physical world with their help. The students were over 18 years old, so they deliberately chose the scholarchs. Many of the students were already influenced by the idea of agathos (ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα) (Plato 1978a, 6.505a–6.509c; 6.510a-6.511d). Therefore, they only needed an experienced guide to transcendence. The joint ascent into transcendence with the scholarch subdued and transformed the discourse and a way of life of the students. The education took from several years to decades, through to the period of moulding the “correctness of the gaze” on the highest idea image. Scholarchs gave students the instructions in the intelligibility of the complexity of the transcendence, namely, to be meaningfully present in the transcendental and physical reality. The students mastered the “human sophia,” which turned them into philosophers (daimons, δαίμων), mediators between the transcendence and the physical world (Plato 1995c, 397e-398c).

The mastering of the “human sophia” was an important stage of the “philosophy-as-a-way-of-life,” but not the main one. The meaningful presence of psyche was provided by phronesis, the use of the “human sophia” at the God’s behest (“κατὰ τὸν θεόν”) (Plato 1995a, 22a, 23b). Philosophers imitated demiurge, who created the kalos cosmos, inspired by the idea of agathos. According to Plato, the cosmos was kalos (beautiful), and his creator or demiurge (δημιουργός) was agathos (good) (εἰ μὲν δὴ καλὸς ἐστὶν ὁδε ὁ κόσμος ὃ τε δημιουργὸς ἀγαθός) (Plato 1978b, 29a). Therefore, the transformation of the discourse and the way of life of the students did not take place to master the “human sophia” (ἄνθρωπίνη σοφία), i.e., *philosophical thinking* (Walczak 2020). The ultimate goal of the ascent to sophia was phronesis. In general, the scale of the kalos cosmos transformations following the image of the highest idea determined the meaningful presence of philosophers and philosophy (Krichevsky 2020).

Philosophers differed from *people* (demos) in that their meaningful presence determined the scale of transformations in the transcendence and physical world. If *people* conformed to politeia and lived under the physical world laws, then the philosophers were the source of the rebellious state of discontent, *atopos*. Socrates, during his lifetime, was known as atopos (noun – ατοπία (atopía), adjective – ἄτοπος (átopos)), unclassifiable, high originality (Plato 1903a, 361a-b). The rebelliousness of philosophers came from the fact that they *saw* the essence of things in the transcendence, *eidoi* (εἶδη, plural of eidos (εἶδος)), where the idea of agathos was manifested. The eidoi used philosophers and philosophy as intermediaries. The eidoi imposed their will upon them and

moulded the physical world through them, transforming it into their likeness. Plato argued that (1) only philosophical thinking grasps what is called “eidoi” (Annas 2002, 83 – 87). (2) Eidoi were images (εικόν) for the demiurge (God) who created the kalos cosmos (Plato 1995c, 439c-440d; Plato, 1978b: 51a-52a; Plato, 1978a: 10.596a-10.598d).

Political education in Plato’s philosophy

Plato saw philosophy as the key link between the transcendence and physical world. The idea of agathos was revealed in eidoi. The eidoi had the specific agathos moulding power. Philosophy had authenticated itself with this power and philosophers with its potentials. Philosophy implemented the transduction of eidos, or “ideal” model, from transcendence into physical reality. It was a way of physical reality moulding, and it was revealed as *political education* in this context. Philosophy as the *politeia* was the force of self-assembly of society. Philosophy as *political education* was the force of self-assembly with the adjustable focus and limits. The self-assembly took place in strict adherence to the proclaimed transcendental ideal, the *image of eidos*.

Francesco Petrarca called the Middle Ages the “Dark Ages.” It is a profound mistake! In fact, the Middle Ages were characterized by the successful implementation of the “philosophy-as-a-way-of-life” in practice. First, the Church Fathers created *the Kingdom of God* in transcendence. They used the disclosedness of the kalos cosmos to form the transcendental ideal, a certain *eidos*. The holistically intelligible transcendence, presented in the eidos, had broken new ground for the self-assembly of society. The “human sophia” was revealed in the Word of God. In Judaism, the duality of Logos as a connecting link between God and man was evident: (a) in the creative power of the Word of God. “And God said, “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3). Furthermore, b) in the Word of Intermediaries between God and men, or the Word of Divine Revelation (Ο λόγος της θείας αποκάλυψης). Hadot has come to the conclusion that it is in this sense that one should understand the prologue of the Gospel of John, which is decisive for the Christian epistemology (Hadot 1999, 250 – 251).

At the second stage, the Church Fathers used the moulding power of the transcendental ideal to build a real model of political education as the image of the “ideal” model. They organized monasticism as a specific discourse and a way of life that provided transcendence-and-return, or the mediation between transcendence and physical reality. Political education popularized the images of “Man of Faith,” “Confessor of the Faith,” a “martyr” and others, as an “ideal” image (εικόν) to imitate (μιμησις) that subordinated and transformed students’ discourse and a way of life. Political education ensured the significance of God’s Word as the moulding power in transcendence and physical reality. Finally, at the third stage, the *Founders* (οἰκιστὰι πόλεως, “founders of

a state”) (Plato 1978a, 2.379a) used the Word of God to create a real model of the Earthly City as an image (εἰκόν) of the City of God (Augustine 1998). In Europe and the Near East, with a population of more than ten million people, the Christian Church was built.

According to Plato, Kallipolis (Καλλίπολις), the City of God, the Sophia Republic and any other “ideal” model of the cosmic civilization, were originally created in transcendence (Plato 1978a, 2.369b-4.445e). The “ideal” model of global sustainability should become a specific *eidos* or the holistically intelligible complexity of transcendence. Only after that there were created the “ideal” and real models of political education, with the help of which the transduction of *eidos* into the physical reality is carried out. *Political education moulds physical reality, as a conductor of the *eidos* moulding power.*

The allegory of the cave reveals the main idea of political education, presented by Plato (Plato 1978a, 7.514a – 7.520a). *Transcendence and physical reality are interconnected, so that transcendence moulds the physical reality.* The *eidoi* have real moulding power. It is necessary to pass from the physical world into transcendence or *to transcend* to master this power and ensure its transduction. Therefore, Plato proposed “philosophy-as-a-way-of-life” as a way of transcendence-and-return. On the one hand, the arete liberation assumed the holistic intelligibility of the transcendence and the mastering of the “human sophia” (“ἄνθρωπίνη σοφία”). On the other hand, the “human sophia” envisaged the moulding of physical reality, *phronesis*. *The idea of political education was to create kalos politeia as the image of the kalos cosmos, represented by the transcendental ideal.*

It is erroneous to regard the arete liberation as the liberation of the demos. Plato railed against free demos. He associated freedom with democracy, one of the worst politeia models (Plato 1978a, 8.555b – 8.562a). For Plato, even the philosophers were not free in their actions. “We must not allow what is now permitted.” “What is that?” “That they should linger there,” I said, “and refuse to go down again among those bondsmen and share their labors and honors, whether they are of a lessor or greater worth” (Plato 1978a, 7.519d). They listened to God’s behest (Plato 1995a, 23b) and were the potentials of the *eidos* moulding power. Plato considered political education as a way of achieving sustainable development and prosperity in Athens. Therefore, he regarded the arete liberation as the directional selection or *the moulding of the arete potency in strict compliance with the agathos idea as the image of the highest idea* (Plato 1978a, 7.540a-b).

Conclusions

“Philosophy-as-a-way-of-life” remains relevant to this day. The Platonic method moulds the meaningful presence of the people (demos) by *aletheia* and

the absolutized truths of the transcendental ideal. Plato believed that trustworthy (αληθινός) philosophers are those who love contemplating (φιλοθεάμονας) aletheia (ἀληθεία) (Plato 1978a, 5. 475e).

Plato’s philosophy creates a recognizable image of political education: education as the moulding of a certain “correctness of the gaze” on the image of the highest idea. The moulding power of the transcendental ideal is used to establish the focus and limits of the self-realization. A specific discourse and way of life are formed that provides the mastering of the “human sophia.” It follows from Plato’s philosophy that the arete is unable to independently free itself from hiddenness and overcome the boundaries of the physical world to master the “human sophia.”

REFERENCES

- Augustine of Hippo, 1998. *The City of God*. St. Petersburg: Aletheia. Available from: https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Avrelij_Avgustin/o-grade-bozhem/
- Annas, J., 2002. *Plato: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Bazaluk, O., 2021. The Sophia Republic: The Special Theory of Education. *Philosophy and Cosmology*, Volume 26, 62 – 76. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.29202/phil-cosm/26/5>
- Eliopoulos, P., 2019. From the Moral Limits of Personal Interest to the Derogation of Individual Identity: Colonialism and Oppression. *Ukrainian Policymaker*, Volume 4, 4 – 12. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.29202/up/4/1>
- Jaeger, W., 1946. *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture: Volume I: Archaic Greece: The Mind of Athens*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford. Available from: <https://archive.org/stream/werner-jaeger-paideia-the-ideals-of-greek-culture-voll1#page/n1/mode/2up>
- Hadot, P., 1999. *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* Moscow: Publishing House of Humanities.
- Hadot, P., 2005. *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Conversations with Jeannie Carlier and Arnold I. Davidson*. Moscow, St.-Petersburg: Stepnoy veter.
- Kharkovshchenko, Y., 2019. The Conceptualization of Σοφία in Ancient Greek Philosophy: from Earthly to Cosmological. *Philosophy and Cosmology*, Volume 23, 139 – 146. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.29202/phil-cosm/23/13>
- Krichevsky, S., 2020. Creation of a “Cosmic” Human: Ideas, Technologies, Projects, Experience, Risks, Limitations, and Prospects. *Future Human Image*, Volume 13, 32 – 45. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.29202/fhi/13/4>

- Plato, 1995a. Ἀπολογία Σωκράτους. In: Duke, E.A., Hicken, W.F., Nicoll, W.S.M., Robinson, D.B. & Strachan, J.C.G. (eds). *Oxford Classical Texts: Platonis Opera*, Vol. 1: Tetralogiae I – II. Oxford University Press; Oxford Classical Texts.
- Plato, 1995b. Φαίδων. In: Duke, E.A., Hicken, W.F., Nicoll, W.S.M., Robinson, D.B. & Strachan, J.C.G. (eds). *Oxford Classical Texts: Platonis Opera*, Vol. 1: Tetralogiae I – II. Oxford University Press; Oxford Classical Texts.
- Plato, 1995c. Κρατύλος. In: Duke, E.A., Hicken, W.F., Nicoll, W.S.M., Robinson, D.B. & Strachan, J.C.G. (eds). *Oxford Classical Texts: Platonis Opera*, Vol. 1: Tetralogiae I – II. Oxford University Press; Oxford Classical Texts.
- Plato, 1995d. Θεαίτητος. In: Duke, E.A., Hicken, W.F., Nicoll, W.S.M., Robinson, D.B. & Strachan, J.C.G. (eds). *Oxford Classical Texts: Platonis Opera*, Vol. 1: Tetralogiae I – II. Oxford University Press; Oxford Classical Texts.
- Plato, 1901a. Συμπόσιον. In: Burnet, J. (ed.). *Oxford Classical Texts: Platonis Opera*. Vol. 2: Tetralogia III – IV. Oxford University Press; Oxford Classical Texts.
- Plato, 1901b. Φαῖδρος. In: Burnet, J. (ed.). *Oxford Classical Texts: Platonis Opera*. Vol. 2: Tetralogia III – IV. Oxford University Press; Oxford Classical Texts.
- Plato, 1903a. Πρωταγόρας. In: Burnet, J. (ed.). *Oxford Classical Texts: Platonis Opera*. Vol. 3: Tetralogia V – VII. Oxford University Press; Oxford Classical Texts.
- Plato, 1903b. Μένων. In: Burnet, J. (ed.). *Oxford Classical Texts: Platonis Opera*. Vol. 3: Tetralogia V – VII. Oxford University Press; Oxford Classical Texts.
- Plato, 1903c. Ἱππίας μείζων. In: Burnet, J. (ed.) *Oxford Classical Texts: Platonis Opera*. Vol. 3: Tetralogia V – VII. Oxford University Press; Oxford Classical Texts.
- Plato, 1978a. Πολιτεία. In: Burnet, J. (ed.) *Oxford Classical Texts: Platonis Opera*. Vol. 4: Tetralogia VIII. Oxford University Press; Oxford Classical Texts.
- Plato, 1978b. Τίμαιος. In: Burnet, J. (ed.) *Oxford Classical Texts: Platonis Opera*. Vol. 4: Tetralogia VIII. Oxford University Press; Oxford Classical Texts.
- Plotinus, 1952. *The Six Enneads*. Translated by Stephen MacKenna and B. S. Page. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica. Available from: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/plotenn/index.htm>

- Sodomora, P. & Yerchenko, O., 2021. Paradoxical Nature of Language in Terms of its Acquisition and Learning (Based on Plato’s “Cratylus”). *Philosophy and Cosmology*, Volume 26, 123 – 131. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.29202/phil-cosm/26/10>
- Toporov, V., 2012. Once again about Dr. Greek. ΣΟΦΙΑ: the origin of the word and its inner meaning. *EINAI: Problems of philosophy and theology*. 2 (2), 2012: 456 – 477. Available from: <https://einai.ru/2013-02-Toporov.html>
- Walczak, P., 2020. Importance of Teaching Philosophy and Ethics in the Light of the Challenges of Future Education. *Future Human Image*, Volume 14, 102 – 107. <https://doi.org/10.29202/fhi/14/12>

✉ **Prof. Dr. Oleg Bazaluk**

Web of Science ResearcherID: F-7904-2017

ORCID iD: 0000-0002-1623-419X

Scopus ID: 56488041400

Guangdong University of Petrochemical Technology

139, Guandu 2 Road

Maonan District

Maoming city, Guangdong province, China

E-mail: bazaluk@ukr.net