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At the Origins of the European Philosophy of Property

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The article researches the philosophical understanding of property in metaphysical doctrines of Plato and Aristotle, the classicists of ancient thought. It proves that the attitude of these thinkers' (and primarily Plato) towards property fits into the general model of human attitude towards the world of social objects and the world in general. This serves the basis for introduction of a special terminological nomination of the "philosophy of property" issue and justification of the thesis about the ways and forms of influence of philosophy of property on European civilization and culture through the adoption of the Platonic and Aristotelian tradition in the interpretation of Christian understanding of property.

Keywords: ancient philosophy, property, philosophy of property, Plato, Aristotle, Christianity.

Research area: history of philosophy.

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Introduction

The basis of philosophical understanding of culture is its division into conceptual basic ideals and derived peripheral values. According to D.V. Pivovarov's figurative terminology, these are "hard core" and "protective belt". The scholar argues that the role of the "hard core" of culture is performed by the fundamental sacred text, whereas the "protective belt" represents its application to social, scientific, practical,

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and everyday practices (Pivovarov, 2013: 38). Everything that makes up the content of the cultural “core” can form the basic ideal aspirations of people sharing the values of this sacred text. It creates the spirit of the era, generates ideological orientations and is, therefore, the subject of philosophical reflection.

The attitude towards property is one of the basic ideas determining the man’s attitude to himself, society, and the world as a whole. At various times, property was seen as the greatest heritage of mankind, the source of all human tragedies. Property was associated with prosperity and freedom, corruption of morals, social injustice and war. One can, therefore, speak of the philosophy of property (similar to the philosophy of culture, art, morality, etc.). The “philosophy of property” term is not common in literature (see: Isupov, Savkin, 1993; Pipes, 2008; Bibikhin, 2012; Bethell, 2018). Three important questions are always in the focus of the philosophy of property. These are the following ones: What is the origin of property? What is its nature and role in relation to society and individual? What are the ways and forms of ideal attitude towards property?

Basing on D.V. Pivovarov’s methodology, it can be argued that for European civilization, European states and countries involved in European orbit, the “hard core” of culture is a set of the biblical Christian values, which are recognized as fundamental and binding for those who recognize themselves as Christians as well as for those who deny Christianity. There are Christian values in European peoples’ laws, customs and traditions. Even the laws of freedom of conscience proclaiming the possibility to profess any religion or not to profess any are rooted in the Christian principle of tolerance towards non-believers as “neighbours” who should be loved as thyself (Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27).

Christianity establishes its own philosophy of property, its main principle being that of the relative autonomy of property which does not affect finding salvation. The rich can also be saved the way a rich young man was. That rich young man turned to Christ with the question “What must be done to find eternal life?” He was beloved by the master even though he failed to fulfill the biblical standard of conduct: “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven” (Mark 10:21). Salvation, understood in Christian terms, is available to both the poor and the rich.

Yet, basic paradigms of determining the subject of the philosophy of property were formed several centuries before Christ in the Greek-Hellenistic philosophical traditions, represented by Plato and Aristotle, two leading figures of the Philosophical

School of Athens. These were the origins of European civilization and its approaches (to property *inter alia*) which were peculiarly assimilated in the Christian period of European history as well.

Platonic tradition in the formation of the European philosophy of property

When considering the Platonic tradition in the formation of the idea of property, it is necessary to take into account that Plato's social teaching, including his attitude towards property, is organically connected with his philosophical doctrine.

According to Plato, the intelligible world differs from the earthly existence as the cause from the consequence, the original from the copy, the absolute basis from the transient form of individual phenomena. They are also pitted against each other as per the value aspect: the kingdom of ideas is divine, wise, perfect, and infinitely superior to the world of sense objects. A human's general objective, moral and cognitive aim is to join the world of ideas, the idea of the Good. But the knowledge of the world of ideas is difficult for the man, since it involves limitation of physicality. It follows that the man's task is the maximum separation of the soul from the body, which is at the same time the liberation of the soul from the material fetters.

According to Plato, because of its imperfection the human body is subject to diseases, requires care and food, which distracts from approaching the world of ideas, truth and the Good. Plato associated physicality with the passion for acquisitiveness, due to which the world faces not only calamities. The soul also gets "weightier", this "weight" preventing it from staying in its heavenly homeland. Thus, the soul falls to the ground again and again, finding the body in new births.

In "Phaedrus" dialogue, by the mouth of one of the characters Plato teaches the myth of the charioteer controlling two horses — white and black. The noble and beautiful white horse "loves honor, but at the same time is prudent and conscientious". It is not necessary to drive it with the whip, as it can be directed by order and word only. This is a courageous or "ardent" part of the soul. The ugly, fat, snub-nosed black horse is "a friend of arrogance and boasting". It drags everyone down to the ground, because it is full of greed and desire to get as many material benefits as possible. If the charioteer manages to subdue the sordid principle and overcome the attachment to material goods, the soul will be able to rise and blissfully contemplate the true existence, doing it together with the gods. If not, the soul will fail to get the wings, soar to the sky and, thus, it will constantly fall down to the earth from the subtle world of

higher entities. Greed and covetousness are ultimately the reason why once immortal souls that together with the gods ascended to the world of pure images became mortal men. The more numerous the vices and passion for material goods are, the worse the men's subsequent life will be (Plato, 1970: 180–185).

Plato believed that the lack of passion for wealth accumulation removes the causes of discord in society. In his dialogue “Republic”, on behalf of Socrates Plato says: “Is it not because it happens in the state that there are out-of-place cries “It is mine!” or “It is not mine!”. The cries are the same about someone else's. ...And the place where the majority says the same about similar things — “It is mine!” or “It is not mine!” — can boast of the best state system” (Plato, 2018: 209). The origin of property is, therefore, connected with the man's crude material existence and the state should help him/her to overcome his/her limitations.

Plato's “Republic” reflects these ascetically colored ideas. For Plato, ideal society is the state of education. Laws and state system aim at maximum fostering the citizens' virtues. The state, according to his plan, is a means of establishing beauty and justice in the world, which most fully contributes to the soul's memories for its orientation towards the heavenly original. The state is valuable precisely because it allows weak people, who are unable to curb their own sordid desires, to join the wisdom of those with a more perfect soul.

For Plato, the ideal state is a hierarchically organized and clearly defined unity of three functions: legislation or management, protection from enemies, and regard for material security. Accordingly, these functions should refer to three classes of citizens, and namely the rulers, the guards, the farmers, and the artisans. Each class, or stratum has its own virtue. The rulers have wisdom that allows them to think and to manage the state as a whole, as well as to subordinate the interests of all individual parts to its good. Courage, the second virtue, is a specific quality of the guardians and soldiers belonging to the next class which ranks second in the hierarchy. They must primarily have the right opinion about what to fear and what not to fear. This opinion is set by the legislator-rulers. Prudence and moderation are qualities that make the main virtue of the third, lower class.

In addition to these three virtues, there is one more virtue, which is the most important, the virtue being characteristic of the state as a whole and making its entire existence possible. This virtue is justice, the essence of which is in the fact that each class should be limited to the performance of their function and be content with their own, clearly defined place in the hierarchy without going beyond its scope.

One of the characteristics of this ideal state is complete exclusion of individual freedom. Like philosophers, the representatives of the privileged class of guardians have nothing personal. They live and eat together. They have no families; they do not know their children. They have only temporary sexual relations with women, as their minds are primarily focused on the state benefit. Everything is adjusted so that the best were together with the best, the fact supporting the breed. It is determined and known in advance what they will read, what music they will listen to. The very idea of personal tastes and other manifestations of individuality are abandoned. For these purposes, the philosophers' and the warriors' private property is abolished, since it separates people and destroys the unity of the state.

Another feature of Plato's model of socially equitable life is its sharply defined elitism. In the ideal state, everything is decided by the rulers who are the wise men. They decide to which certain class the people belong, consider the issue of men's and women's connection, conduct a strict audit and censorship of art. It is quite possible to manipulate the citizens' consciousness by propagating the ideas favorable from the point of view of the state interests. Refer, for example, to the myth about the gods who made men unequal in the bowels of the earth, having mixed gold with some of them, silver with the other ones and copper or iron with the rest. The issue of happiness is not taken into account. "Now we are sculpting the state in our imagination, the state being a happy one, we believe. The state is happy not only in its separate part, when only some people are happy in it. We are sculpting it so that everything is happy in general..." (Plato, 2018: 145). Plato's ideal individual should be guided not by his/her own good, but by the good of the state, at the cost of sacrifice of his/her own individuality.

Plato's philosophy of property and state can be regarded differently. All later commentators note the utopianism and elitism of Plato's doctrine. V. Solov'ev, a Russian philosopher, considered it to be the reflection of Plato's life tragedy and the search for an unenforceable ideal: "Under the pretext of correcting a worldly falsehood, the solemn affirmation of this falsehood *in the very form* in which the righteous is condemned and killed, I do not know a more significant and profound tragedy in human history" (Solov'ev, 1988: 624). According to A.F. Losev and A.A. Takho-Godi, basing on his best intentions, Plato built a state system in his "Republic", the system being "so perfect and so absolute that no changes and movement forward can be thought of" (Losev, Takho-Godi, 2014: 239). In "The Laws", Plato's later work written during the last seven years of his life and remained unfinished, there is no theory of ideas, which previously inspired his system. Moreover, Plato created a model of an even more

rigid state with a complete land equation, abolition of all personal property, universal denunciation, “with doll-people” (Losev, Takho-Godi, 2014: 242–243).

Thus, the consequence of Plato’s doctrine about two realities — the material world and the ideal world — was a dichotomy: the man either ascends to the heavenly heights or moves farther away from them. The “average” associated with the material culture and civilization development as well as with everyday virtues that guide everyday work and life does not fit into this dichotomous system. The consequence of the absolute superiority of the Good, in its turn, is the priority of the whole over the part and that on the earth. This is one of the first projects of social impersonalism: priority of the state over the human lays the principle of the citizens’ unconditional subordination to the interests of the public good, priority of the public property over the private one.

Despite this, one cannot but admire Plato’s belief in the immortality of the soul and its superior importance in relation to everything earthly and perishable. This has a direct relation to Christianity. According to A. Armstrong, a famous English historian of philosophy: “Everyone who believes in an objective and unchanging standard of morality governing public as well as private life, in the soul as immaterial and immortal and the most important part of man, in the governance of the world by Divine Reason and in the existence of eternal archetypes or patterns of all things that come to be and pass away, with which our behavior and thought must conform, everyone who believes all this or an important part of it can claim to be in the tradition which goes back unbroken to Plato and Socrates: though the later development of the Platonic school and, much more, the transforming influence of Christianity have very much altered the content of these beliefs, yet the tradition of their development has been continuous” (Armstrong, 1949: 64–65).

Aristotelian tradition of understanding property

Aristotle, Plato’s great disciple, a successor but also his critic, developed a different approach to the formation of the idea of property. If we consider Plato a utopian, then Aristotle is the first thinker who looked soberly at Plato’s teaching as utopia and overcame it. At the ontological level, he rejected the division between the world of ideas and the world of things. At the axiological level, Aristotle denied the opposition of moral values and the benefits of life, considering both as necessary components of human life. Adhering to the middle between hedonism and asceticism, he claimed the ideal of happiness. At the epistemological level, he restored the rights of experience and

concrete observation, having removed the mysterious veil from Plato's contemplative practices.

Revealing the Platonic project's utopianism, Aristotle sees it primarily in the absence of private property. "It is difficult to express in words, — says Aristotle, — how much pleasure there is in the awareness that something belongs to you, since everyone's feeling of love for himself is not accidental but is embedded in us by nature itself..." (Aristotle, 2016: 52).

The human being's natural selfishness is inseparable from the possession of property, because people care more about what belongs to them personally, they care less about what is common, or care to the extent concerning everyone" (Aristotle, 2016: 46). In addition, people tend to be careless in their expectation of care from another.

According to Aristotle, selfishness deserves censure. Yet, egoism is not self-love but only an excessive degree of this love. The man's virtue, including generosity and stinginess, depends on him/herself. The man is responsible for his/her own character; he/she directs his own behavior. According to Aristotle, the man can do this either because of his nature or despite it.

Aristotle denies Plato's claim that common property puts an end to public discord. He insists that, on the contrary, people who own things together tend to quarrel over them more than those who possess their personal property. He sees the cause of public discord not in the thirst for property but in human nature itself — "rather... these are human lusts but not property that should be equated" (Aristotle, 2016: 66). Abolition of private property, therefore, will not solve social differences.

Moreover, Aristotle argues that possession raises a person to new ethical heights, as it gives him/her the opportunity to be generous: "Generosity reveals itself when it comes to disposal of one's good" (Aristotle, 2016: 53). This argument was later repeatedly cited by Christian theologians to justify property as a means of mercy. Aristotle taught that the one who, like Plato, seeks to unite the state and abolish private property deprives people of the opportunity to engage in charity, to help friends and comrades. It is pleasant to render services and help to friends, acquaintances and companions, which is possible only on condition of personal property existence.

Aristotle asserts the ideal of contemplative comprehension of truth as a pattern and goal of blissful life. The philosopher admits that this ideal is difficult to achieve for a person as it is available in full only to deity. The man can and should strive for this ideal, as there is something divine in the him/her. Yet, Aristotle and Plato believed, human nature is imperfect. Because of this, the man needs benefits. Bodily health,

food, and certain conditions of life, and even wealth are also necessary. He compares these benefits with the tools we choose as the means for the purpose pursued.

In his “Nicomachean ethics” Aristotle considered generosity and magnificence as main virtues in relation to property. By the virtue of generosity he means possession of the middle with regard to the property, as the middle is equally far from the extremes of extravagance and avarice. A generous man knows whom, when and how much to give — he/she is careful with his property and does not waste it in vain. The man can distribute even more than it should be. It is excusable, since the generous cares not about him/herself but about other ones. Aristotle believes that it is not the size of the given but its share in relation to all property that is important for the virtue of generosity (Aristotle, 2010). Thus, for the generous the virtue must be more important than wealth.

If one does not need to be rich in order to be generous, then the virtue of magnificence implies the possession of considerable wealth and means large expenses. To such expenses the philosopher refers everything that is connected with the worship of gods and arranging one’s own house, as it serves a decoration of the whole city, as well as public events (reception of foreign guests, organization of a feast for the whole city, etc.). Moreover, all these expenses are made by a virtuous magnificent man only for the love of beauty but not for the purpose of self-affirmation.

Equally condemning wastefulness and stinginess, Aristotle especially severely criticizes that kind of avarice, which implies excessive acquisition. Aristotle’s attitude towards it is determined by the difference he sets between two opposing types of economy. These are “economics” (the science of household) and “chrematistics” (the art of making a fortune). Economics is the right type of economic activity. Its purpose is in reasonable satisfaction of economic needs of the “home” or the “family”. It gives the family everything its members need to achieve bliss, their highest goal. Economic acquisition is the one that is “consistent with nature” (Aristotle, 2016: 29).

In contrast to economics, “chrematistics” is a negative type of economic activity, condemned by Aristotle. Its goal is to serve not the highest tasks of human life but unlimited profit, unlimited acquisition, and accumulation. In this type of economic activity, acquisitiveness is an end in itself. It is pursued for the sake of economic goods proper and expresses the desire for consumerism but not for a good life. Since the thirst for consumption is unlimited, then the desire for those means that serve to quench it is unlimited and does not give the knowledge of the benefit of property.

According to the philosopher, it is necessary to stick to that way of using property which combines the system of common and private property. “Property should be

common only in a relative sense; yet, actually it should be private” (Aristotle, 2016: 51) Aristotle praises the results of this division: after the use of property is divided between individuals, mutual complaints will disappear among them, and there will be a big win, “since everyone will be zealous to treat what belongs to him, the virtue being a kind of a regulator in use, according to “Friends have everything in common” proverb” (Aristotle, 2016: 51).

Aristotle believed that it is not mainly property that must be equated but “lust”. And this requires not equation but people’s education through the laws. People act unfairly not only because of inequality in basic necessities but because they want to live in joy and make their desires come true. People’s lusts are unlimited by their nature. It is in their satisfaction that most people’s lives pass. The greatest crimes are committed by people in their strive for overabundance. Therefore, there is a more important principle than property equation: it is necessary to regulate relations in society so that people intelligent by nature had no desire to possess more and underdeveloped people had no opportunity to wish it.

Overall, the Aristotelian version is consistent with the biblical principle of moderate attitude to property: “If wealth increases, do not set your heart on it” (Psalm 61:11).

Conclusion

European philosophy rests on the basic biblical postulates of property autonomy as a sort of expression of the man’s earthly attachment from his/her spiritual needs. At the same time, Christianity has never denied or condemned the right to property. Attachment to property as an ideal-forming basis, the highest value, the “core” of culture and the engine of human history was denied and condemned.

The analysis proves that one can hardly say that Plato’s and Aristotle’s ancient philosophy had a significant impact on the worldview and interpretation of the forms of Christian social thought, including the formation of the attitude towards property. At the same time, both Plato and Aristotle are surprisingly quite consistent with the Christian vision of the role of property in human life, for both thinkers maintained a distance between the earthly and the heavenly, the material and the spiritual, giving preference to spiritual values and the highest goals of the knowledge of Good, Truth and Beauty. Both Plato and Aristotle associated the purpose of life with contact with the eternal, the divine. They called for accumulation of moral virtues but not of transient material goods. Later, both philosophers had a significant impact on Christian authors (apologists, fathers and teachers of the Church, religious philosophers) and through them on the mentality of the European consciousness.

The ideal of the Platonic “non-proprietary” life is embodied in avaricious monastic prayer service. Aristotle’s idea of property as the good in the merciful service to others is quite consistent with the worldly way of life. It is no accident that at the entrance of Greek Orthodox churches they still observe a tradition to place the images of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle in the antechambers and call them “Christians before Christ”.

It should be remembered that “any apparent formula of the meaning of life is just a hint symbolizing only the top of its iceberg” (Pivovarov, 2016: 518), that real life is often far from the ideals put forward.

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У истоков европейской философии собственности

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Статья посвящена исследованию философского осмысления собственности в метафизических построениях классиков античной мысли Платона и Аристотеля. Показывается, что отношение к собственности у этих мыслителей, и прежде всего у Платона, вписываются в общую модель отношения человека к миру социальных объектов и к миру в целом. На основе этого предлагается введение специального терминологического обозначения данной проблематики — «философия собственности» и обосновывается тезис о путях и формах влияния философии собственности на европейскую цивилизацию и культуру через принятие платонической и аристотелевской традиции в интерпретации христианского понимания собственности.

Ключевые слова: античная философия, собственность, философия собственности, Платон, Аристотель, христианство.

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