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# The Common Good: from the Philosophical Basis to the Constitutional Principle

## Part Two: Religious Aspect of Plato’s Vision of the Common Good

### Abstract

This article is an attempt to analyse Plato’s concept of the common good as a theory safeguarding the general welfare (as such) to a much wider extent than man-centred contemporary theories. It will be shown, through references to the *Laws* and the *Republic*, that Plato perceived his idea as state-forming. His theory is a very accurate interpretation of concern for the general welfare. This article also indicates the role of religious elements in Plato’s concept of the common good.

**Keywords:** Plato, concept of the common good, law, religion, social community

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## Introduction

This article concerns the Platonic vision of the common good<sup>2</sup> – an element which was signalled in the previous article on the reception of Plato's thoughts in the contemporary philosophy<sup>3</sup>, also with the inclusion of Aristotelianism<sup>4</sup> and Thomism<sup>5</sup>. It has been argued that the atypical nature of Plato's idea is attributed to the fact that it defines the role of an individual in a community in a completely different way<sup>6</sup>. Such concept of the common good places the emphasis on the state (as a community of people)<sup>7</sup> instead of the man (as an individual)<sup>8</sup>. This difference in the emphasis means a complete reversal of the majority view<sup>9</sup> which places the individual above the state – and not as subordinate to the state<sup>10</sup>. Regardless of which concept of the genesis of the state is taken into account (e.g. that developed by Saint Augustine<sup>11</sup>, Saint Thomas Aquinas<sup>12</sup>, R. Filmer<sup>13</sup>, K. Haller<sup>14</sup>, T. Hobbes<sup>15</sup>,

<sup>2</sup> See V. Lewis, *The Common Good in Classical Political Philosophy*, "Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education", 2006, 1, p. 25–41.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. A. Fuyarchuk, *Gadamer's Path to Plato: A Response to Heidegger and a Rejoinder by Stanley Rosen*, Eugene 2010.

<sup>4</sup> See Arystoteles, *Polityka*, Vol. II, § II–V.

<sup>5</sup> See St. Tomasz, *De Regno*, part I, § II.

<sup>6</sup> See D. Hollenbach, *The common good revisited*, "Theological Studies" 1989, 50, p. 70–94.

<sup>7</sup> See M. Żmigrodzki et al., *Wprowadzenie do nauki o państwie i polityce*, Lublin 2007, p. 22–46.

<sup>8</sup> See K. Krajewski, *Etyka społeczna*, [in:] T. Rakowski (ed.), *U źródeł tożsamości kultury europejskiej*, Lublin 1994, p. 187–191.

<sup>9</sup> See J. Magness, *The genesis and gestation of a justice journey: Catherine Pinkerton, champion of and educator for the common good*, Blacksburg 1999.

<sup>10</sup> See A. Kos, *Zasada suwerenności narodu*, "Zeszyty Naukowe Państwowej Wyższej Szkoły Zawodowej im. Witelona w Legnicy" 2015, 2, p. 35–47.

<sup>11</sup> See M. Płóciennik, *Państwo Boże w relacji do Kościoła i świata w De civitate Dei św. Augustyna (księgi 11–22). Teologiczno-filozoficzne refleksje na gruncie chrześcijańskiej historiozofii*, "Studia Philosophiae Christianae" 2013, 49, p. 5–22.

<sup>12</sup> See K. Kaczmarek, *Prasocjologia św. Tomasza z Akwinu*, Poznań 1999.

<sup>13</sup> See A. Szczap, *Patriarchalizm i paternalizm w angielskiej myśli filozoficznej XVII wieku. Rozważania Filmera, Hobbesa i Locke'a*, „Idea” 2015, 28, p. 305–313.

<sup>14</sup> See J. Adams, *The Rule of the Father: Patriarchy and Patrimonialism in Early Modern Europe*, [in:] P. Gorski (ed.) et al., *Max Weber's Economy and Society: A Critical Companion*, Stamford 2005, p. 237–266.

<sup>15</sup> See M. Miłkowski, *Hobbesa konstrukcja pojęcia wolności*, "Przegląd Filozoficzno-Literacki" 2011, 1, p. 209–220.

and other representatives of the so-called social contract theory<sup>16</sup>, L. Gumplowicz<sup>17</sup>, F. Engels<sup>18</sup>, etc.), an important role in the community is assigned to public authorities<sup>19</sup>. The problem is that the majority of contemporary theories of the common good treat the society as a community of individuals<sup>20</sup>, which results in the need to care, first of all, for the individual interest<sup>21</sup>, and not for the broadly understood commonwealth<sup>22</sup>. Such an assumption seems to be highly non-social<sup>23</sup>.

This article discusses the religious aspect of the Platonic concept of the “common good” as an element which is relatively rarely presented in literature<sup>24</sup>. In relation to the above, a question may be posed whether this vision of the “common good” does not involve more concern for the “social community”<sup>25</sup> than theories emphasising the sovereignty of individuals<sup>26</sup>. A society that is strongly united around building its unity<sup>27</sup> and its state is longer lasting<sup>28</sup> and stronger. For this reason, Plato’s vision of the “common good” can be seen as featuring an important state-forming element and should not, therefore, be perceived in the context of its authoritarian meaning/application. Especially as, if judging from this point of view,

<sup>16</sup> E.g. J. Locke, J. Rousseau, H. Grocjusz, etc. – more broadly: E. Cassirer, *A question of Jean Jacques Rousseau*, New York 1954; A. Krawczyk, *Hobbes i Locke: dwoiste oblicze liberalizmu*, Warszawa 2011; E. Dumbauld, *The life and legal writings of Hugo Grotius*, Norman 1969.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. A. Śliz et al., *Konflikt społeczny i jego funkcje. Między destrukcją a kreacją*, „Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska” 2011, 36, p. 7–24.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. F. Engels, *Pochodzenie rodziny, własności prywatnej i państwa. W związku z badaniami Lewisa H. Morgana*, Zürich 1884 [Po 1945 roku opublikowano w Polsce m. in. jako XXI tom „Dzieł” K. Marksa i F. Engelsa (Warszawa 1969)].

<sup>19</sup> See J. Woźnicki, *Nowa dyscyplina – „nauki o polityce publicznej” usytuowana w dziedzinie nauk społecznych*, „Nauka” 2012, 1, p. 133–151.

<sup>20</sup> This issue has been thoroughly discussed by P. Sztompka [in:] *Socjologia. Analiza społeczeństwa*, Kraków 2012.

<sup>21</sup> See J. Gałkowski et al., *Spółczeństwo obywatelskie a moralność*, „Annales” 2010, 1, p. 69–75.

<sup>22</sup> See H. Sasinowski, *Spółczeństwo obywatelskie i jego rola w budowie demokracji*, „Economy and Management” 2012, 1, p. 30–47.

<sup>23</sup> See J. Blicharz, *Administracja publiczna i społeczeństwo obywatelskie w państwie prawa*, Wrocław 2012, p. 13–63.

<sup>24</sup> See M. Pate, *From Plato to Jesus: What Does Philosophy Have to Do with Theology?*, Grand Rapids 2011.

<sup>25</sup> See S. Grochmal, *Paradygmat jedności w kontekście zarządzania organizacjami*, Rzeszów 2013.

<sup>26</sup> See Ch. Lubich, *Braterstwo w polityce. Utopia czy konieczność?*, „Nowe Miasto” 2004, 6, p. 5–10.

<sup>27</sup> See A. Lech, *Spółczne konstruowanie rzeczywistości obiektywnej*, „Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Śląskiej” 2013, 65, p. 183–194.

<sup>28</sup> See W. Szymczak, *Aksjologia liberalnej i komunitarystycznej wizji społeczeństwa obywatelskiego z perspektywy Alfreda Schütza koncepcji motywów działania*, „Zeszyty Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego” 2014, 4, p. 131–152.

one should also consider T. Hobbes or Saint Thomas Aquinas as supporters of totalitarianism, as the latter considered *every* kind of power to have a divine provenance<sup>29</sup>.

## The state-forming role of Plato's theory of the common good

Various modern ideas emphasise, above all, *the primacy of the individual* over the state<sup>30</sup> and the individual's *independence*<sup>31</sup>. This is a modern approach but it is fully coherent with what has been argued in social sciences for decades. Such an understanding of these issues results from the so-called *humanistic theories of the state*<sup>32</sup>, which also draw attention to such variables as: solidarity<sup>33</sup>, acceptance<sup>34</sup>, psychological parallels between the participants of the state organism<sup>35</sup>, etc. One should agree with J. Brezcka that the ideal of the "common good" presented by Plato was *entirely distorted* by his *interpreters* who interpreted the theory presented in the *Republic*<sup>36</sup> primarily as an outline of an authoritarian-totalitarian system<sup>37</sup>. Such a generalisation, which reduces this concept to authoritarian elements only, unjustifiably flattens the meaning of Plato's idea.

Referring to the source literature (concerning e.g. Kant's concept of the state<sup>38</sup> or the philosophy of Karl Marx<sup>39</sup>), one may get the impression that the *misunder-*

<sup>29</sup> See K. Kaczmarek, op. cit., p. 89–97.

<sup>30</sup> See D. Szczepański, *Polityka społeczna w myśli politycznej Unii Wolności po roku 2000: wybrane zagadnienia*, "Polityka i Społeczeństwo" 2011, 8, p. 316–322.

<sup>31</sup> See M. Kosienkowski, *Pojęcie i determinanty stabilności quasi-państwa*, "Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej" 2008, 6, p. 121–130.

<sup>32</sup> See T. Klementewicz, *Teorie stosunków międzynarodowych w strukturze wiedzy humanistycznej o systemie światowym (cywilizacji światowej)*, "Przegląd Strategiczny" 2012, 1, p. 13–33.

<sup>33</sup> See L. Duguit, *Objective Law I*, "Columbia Law Review" 1920, 8, p. 819 ff.

<sup>34</sup> See J. Oniszczyk, *Ponowoczesność: państwo w ujęciu postnowoczesnym – kilka uwag szczegółowych*, "Kwartalnik Kolegium Ekonomiczno-Społecznego Szkoły Głównej Handlowej" 2012, 1, p. 29.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. S. Tkacz, *O „pozytywności” i „oficjalności” prawa w teorii Leona Petrażyckiego*, "Ruch Prawny, Ekonomiczny i Socjologiczny" 2005, 1, p. 75–92.

<sup>36</sup> The work referred to is „*Politeia*” (translated to English as the *Republic*).

<sup>37</sup> See J. Brezcka, *Relacja jednostka a społeczeństwo: jak platoński ideał „sięgnął” bruku*, [in:] J. Radwanowicz-Wanczewska (ed.), *Jednostka a państwo na przestrzeni wieków*, Białystok 2008, p. 21–24.

<sup>38</sup> See K. Kuźnicz, *Jednostka w kantowskim „państwie celów”*, [in:] J. Radwanowicz-Wanczewska (ed.), op. cit., p. 24–36.

<sup>39</sup> See R. Kochański, *Jednostka i państwo w filozofii marksistowskiej*, [in:] J. Radwanowicz-Wanczewska (ed.), op. cit., p. 36–47.

*standing* and *misinterpretation* of certain theories (concerning e.g. the state<sup>40</sup> and the “common good”<sup>41</sup>) *did not only concern* the thought of Plato, but also at least two of the theories referred to above<sup>42</sup>, i.e. Kantianism<sup>43</sup> and Marxism. Such *misunderstanding* of ideas by their interpreters is *clearly visible* in relation to Marxism<sup>44</sup>; some of the forms it takes is the attribution of Hegelianism to Marx<sup>45</sup> or a significant *discrepancy* between the analysis of the meaning of a given theory<sup>46</sup> and its implementation (most often with disastrous consequences). An example of a similar mechanism of misunderstanding is finding Plato’s alleged influence in areas where such a philosophical inspiration is unrealistic<sup>47</sup>. In conclusion, it should be stated that it is the interpreters of philosophical ideas that are, to a large extent, responsible for their *misunderstanding*.

This was the case, for example, with the Marxist (or even communist) state theory<sup>48</sup> (based on a certain vision of social justice<sup>49</sup>) which, nominally, was introduced in the form of Stalinist Russia’s *totalitarian regime*. In general, we can admit that in case of Marxism, the mistake was its *incorrect interpretation* (for example, finding alleged Hegelianism in the works of K. Marx<sup>50</sup> or the allogical system of “social justice”<sup>51</sup>); moreover, *attempts to implement that theory* in the reality of the state systems existent at the time were utterly erroneous. Complete *detachment of such practical*

<sup>40</sup> See M. Wright, *The origins of political theory*, “Polis” 1988, 2, p. 75–104.

<sup>41</sup> See R. Kamtekar, *Social justice and happiness in the republic: Plato’s two principles*, „History of Political Thought” 2001, 2, p. 189–220.

<sup>42</sup> However, one may discuss with E. Klima as to what extent Hegel’s theories influenced K. Marx (this opinion was expressed by the author on p. 15 of the publication *Państwo – historia idei*). It seems that this is a similarly incorrect generalisation as the fact that, in her opinion, M. Weber was a *nationalist*. (cf. E. Klima, op. cit., p. 16). Rather, one might get the impression (based on the writings of Marx himself) that he fought Hegelianism (cf. K. Marks, *Przyczynek do krytyki heglowskiej filozofii prawa*, [in:] K. Marks, F. Engels, *Wybrane pisma filozoficzne 1844–1846*, Warszawa 1949).

<sup>43</sup> See E. Klima, *Państwo – historia idei*, “Acta Universitatis Lodziensis” 2009, 10, p. 3–19.

<sup>44</sup> See L. Althusser, *W odpowiedzi Johnowi Lewisowi*, Warszawa 1988 [first Polish edition of the 1973 publication].

<sup>45</sup> See L. Althusser, *O stosunku Marksa do Hegla*, “Człowiek i Światopogląd” 1972, 6 [publication „O stosunku Marksa...” was prepared in 1969].

<sup>46</sup> See P. Katona, *O treści teorii odbicia*, “Acta Universitatis Lodziensis”, 1981, 1, p. 113–124.

<sup>47</sup> See G. Berghaus, *Neoplatonic and Pythagorean Notions of World Harmony and Unity and Their Influence on Renaissance Dance Theory*, “Dance Research”, 1992, 2, p. 43–70.

<sup>48</sup> See P. Tarasiewicz, *Marxistowska koncepcja sprawiedliwości*, [in:] P. Jaroszyński (ed.), *Sprawiedliwość – idea a rzeczywistość*, Lublin 2009, p. 107–122; the claim on the “banishment and forgetting of Marxist mirages” was expressed by the author on p. 109.

<sup>49</sup> See S. Kowalczyk, *Państwo a problem sprawiedliwości społecznej*, “Annales”, 2009, 1, p. 171–178.

<sup>50</sup> See J. Siemek, *Filozofia, dialektyka, rzeczywistość*, Warszawa 1982.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 171.

*interpretations and implementations* from the ideological “roots” is a secondary issue, a classic example of which is the Stalinist totalitarian system which had *nothing* to do with Marx’s actual beliefs.

It means that the misunderstanding concerned *not only* the Platonic vision of the state and the “common good”, and that it is not only this philosopher’s theory that can be considered as the root cause of the totalitarian socio-political system which emerged in the 20th century; a notable example of which is the position of Popper who questioned both Plato and Marx<sup>52</sup>, accusing them (and *other representatives* of philosophical systems) of the mistake of the so-called *historism*<sup>53</sup>. As mentioned above, the objections against Plato were wrong, as his idea was *never put into practice*. However, Karl Popper was *absolutely right* about Marxism because it was the ethical-anthropological philosophical theory of the “young” Karl Marx<sup>54</sup> that became the *theoretical basis* of the *totalitarian systems*<sup>55</sup>.

Against this background, it is clear how different the doctrine of Plato<sup>56</sup> (who knew that the ideal state *did not exist*)<sup>57</sup> is, as well as it becomes clear why its *importance* is questioned and why it is *so commonly* identified with totalitarian systems<sup>58</sup>. The conviction of the *primacy of the individual* over the state<sup>59</sup> is associated with *fundamental social freedom*<sup>60</sup>; even if such reasoning, putting an individual on a pedestal, clearly undermines the basis for the forming of a state<sup>61</sup> or the rationale

<sup>52</sup> E.g. M. Chlewicki, *Spółczesność otwarta i jego przyjaciele. O Popperowskiej interpretacji Marksa*, “Przegląd Filozoficzny” [s.c. “Nowa Seria”] 2014, 4, p. 301–313.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. P. Przybysz, *Dwa modele człowieka. o sporze liberalizm – komunitaryzm*, “Arka” 1994, 3, p. 22–39.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Ł. Iwasiński, *Esencjalistyczna koncepcja człowieka u młodego Karola Marksa – w świetle interpretacji Leszka Kołakowskiego*, “Edukacja Filozoficzna” 2015, 59, p. 153–166. Clearly, the term “young” is commonly used to describe the periodisation of work – cf. G. Lukács, *Młody Hegel. O powiązaniach dialektyki z ekonomią*, Warszawa 1980.

<sup>55</sup> Mowa zarówno o Rosji, jak również Chinach czy Korei Północnej.

<sup>56</sup> See Platon, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Cambridge [published since 1960., volumes XI and XII were published between 1967 and 1968] – w niniejszym tekście, odwołania do „Praw” wskaziwane są wedle powyższego wydania.

<sup>57</sup> Plato, Vol. V, sek. 739e.

<sup>58</sup> See M. Śliwa, *Spoleczne i psychologiczne aspekty totalitaryzmu*, [in:] M. Spychalska et al. (ed.), *Ze studiów nad prawem, administracją i ekonomią*, Wrocław 2014, p. 327–352.

<sup>59</sup> See J. Radwanowicz-Walczewska et al. (ed.), op. cit.

<sup>60</sup> See P. Woroniecki, *Asymetria „przeciwowładzy”. Zarys teorii społeczeństwa „strachu”*, “Szkice Humanistyczne” 2014, 14, p. 9–21.

<sup>61</sup> See P. Przybysz, *Liberalna koncepcja jednostki a marksizm*, [in:] L. Nowak et al. (ed.), *Marksyzm, liberalizm – próby wyjścia*, Poznań 1997, p. 135–157.

for enacting laws<sup>62</sup>, modern humanistic theories still hold on to their findings in this respect.

According to such a view, legal regulations should be unnecessary because it is *only* the freedom of the members of the society that counts; this kind of logic leading to anarchy which Plato would not have been able to accept. Paradoxically, Plato's theory of the common good has the potential for playing a great *state-forming role*, emphasising *the concern for the community* at the cost of *giving up the axiomatic "freedom of the individual"* above everything else<sup>63</sup>. As regards the sustainability of the state organism, the vision presented by the ancient philosopher has a *much greater potential* to ensure the well-being of the state than the "ultra-humanistic" concepts which amplify the importance of freedom understood as an *unwavering permission* to act exclusively according to one's own will, not necessarily in the public interest.

The above remarks allow us to pose the question of whether Plato's theory is not *more oriented* towards the "common good" than those ideas which treat the "community" solely as atomised particles, with each of them having a fundamental right to its own freedom. The aforementioned *primacy* of the society over the state is widely described in the literature, and a typical example of that can be a quotation from a publication by M. Kasiński who discusses L. Duguit's *idea of solidarity*. When addressing this issue, the author makes a comment of much wider cognitive significance, characterising *the subordination of the state* to individuals referred to above. Kasiński writes: "(...) According to L. Duguit and his successors, the starting point for defining administration is not the public authority but the society – an organisation united not by force but by solidarity, and built upon the principles of division of labour and cooperation between members of the social organism performing many different functions, including the administrative function. (...) The state is secondary to the society"<sup>64</sup>.

The above is a typical outline of how the *supremacy of individual freedom* and the subordination of the state organism to that freedom are perceived by contemporary theories. The Platonic vision was radically different, and this is also the reason for its *unpopularity*: in a blatant and uncompromising way it advocated the *subjection of individuals* and the society to the *common good*; it seems that the so-understood theory of the "common good" much *better fulfils* the assumption of the common

<sup>62</sup> See A. Jaciewicz, *Państwo jako zagrożenie i gwarant wolności i praw jednostki*, [in:] J. Radwanowicz-Walczevska et al. (ed.), op. cit., p. 47–64.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. K. Łastawski, *Historyczne i współczesne cechy tożsamości europejskiej*, "Polityka i Społeczeństwo" 2004, 1, p. 206–237.

<sup>64</sup> See M. Kasiński, *Lojalność urzędnika w świetle prawa i etyki*, "Annales" 2010, 1, p. 139–140.

concern for the common good than the theories emphasising (primary, not exclusively) the well-being of individuals and their unquestioned freedom to act as they wish to<sup>65</sup>. We should also agree with B. Olszewska-Dyoniziak that associating the totalitarian theory with Plato is a kind of *abuse*<sup>66</sup>, considering the fact that features of totalitarianism may be identified throughout the entire history of the society of cities and countries, from the ancient times<sup>67</sup>, through the Renaissance<sup>68</sup>, up until the 20th century<sup>69</sup>. Thus, Plato was not the *only one responsible* for promoting the concept of “supremacy of the state over the individual”, and his role was limited to a purely intellectual vision. In contrast, the concepts of totalitarian states were put into practice and existed for many years<sup>70</sup>, without any ideological associations to Platonism. This should be borne in mind whenever a reference is made to the Platonic concept of the “common good” (also related to religious aspects)<sup>71</sup>; this philosopher only referred to *unrealised concepts*<sup>72</sup>, and not to socio-political projects which were put into practice and whose terrible consequences have cost the mankind millions of lives.

## The religious aspect of the Platonic vision of the “common good” – basic approach

The above remarks also refer to the way Plato perceived the *religious context* of political activities<sup>73</sup> which (among other aspects) should contribute to the well-being of the entire community<sup>74</sup>. Plato showed this particularly clearly in the *Laws* where he evidently opted for *folk religiosity*<sup>75</sup>, and from the 1930s onwards, a view was

<sup>65</sup> This also results from T. Hobbes's concept of freedom.

<sup>66</sup> See B. Olszewska-Dyoniziak, *Antropologia totalitaryzmu europejskiego XX wieku*, Wrocław 1999, p. 9 ff.

<sup>67</sup> E.g. Rome in the time of Emperor Diocletian.

<sup>68</sup> E.g. Geneva in the time of John Calvin.

<sup>69</sup> E.g. China in the time of Mao Zedong.

<sup>70</sup> E.g. Stalinist Soviet Russia.

<sup>71</sup> T. Duma, „Religia a totalitaryzm w świecie „Państwa” Platona, [in:] J. Bartyzel et al. (ed.), *Totalitaryzm jawny czy ukryty?*, Lublin 2010, p. 203–222.

<sup>72</sup> For Plato, it is the *ideal*, unrealised, *Republic*.

<sup>73</sup> See R. Patterson, *Plato on Immortality*, Philadelphia 1984.

<sup>74</sup> In a wider understanding: of the state.

<sup>75</sup> E.g. w księgach: II (e.g. § 653c; § 664c; § 672a), III (e.g. § 691d), IV (e.g. § 712b; § 715e; 718b), V (e.g. § 747e, § 729e), VII (e.g. § 793c; § 799a), VIII (e.g. § 835d; § 842e), IX (e.g. § 854a), XI (e.g. § 920d, § 917d), XII (e.g. § 941a; § 946b; 953e).

reinforced that this theory should be interpreted in the way recognising the role of religion in *supporting* the rule of law in the creation of the state<sup>76</sup>. It is a view held also by the researchers of ancient Greece who published at the turn of the 19th and 20th century (e.g. O. Kern<sup>77</sup>, U. von Willamowitz-Moellendorf<sup>78</sup>, E. Zeller<sup>79</sup>); their analyses of the Platonic doctrine of the “common good” in the religious context<sup>80</sup> show that the philosopher’s attitude to religion was not homogeneous, but underwent *changes* over time<sup>81</sup>, when Plato advocated the analysis of religion with the aim of clearing it of any “unrighteousness” and “dark elements”<sup>82</sup>. Apart from the aspect of rationality of this assumption, we should agree with W. Jäger that such an attitude demonstrates Plato’s attachment to the “highest principle” without which he could not imagine the functioning of the ideal “common good”, nor the functioning of the state<sup>83</sup>.

The concept of the “common good” presented in the *Laws* and in the *Republic* is different, but the constitutive element *common* for both works is one word: the *law*<sup>84</sup>. Such a conclusion is in line with the broader concept in accordance with which (as indicated in the *Laws*) politicians who govern a state are obliged to follow *the will of God* as it is God who is responsible for human affairs on Earth<sup>85</sup>. The above does not entail following solely circumstances and the fate with the conviction that God is in charge of them; rather, it should be interpreted to mean that those exercising the public authority are *necessary*, with their professionalism, to guide the state<sup>86</sup> in the right direction, which must be done, however, with the awareness of the *divine interventions* in the reality<sup>87</sup>. This makes it necessary to pose a question: what kind of system would function in an “ideal polis” in which the concept of the “common good” would be most fully expressed in the form of an

<sup>76</sup> E.g. G. Belknap, *Religion in Plato’s states*, Eugene 1935.

<sup>77</sup> See O. Kern, *Die Religion der Griechen*, Berlin 1938, Vol. I–III.

<sup>78</sup> See U. von Willamowitz-Moellendorff, *Der Glaube der Hellen*, Berlin 1931, Vol. I.

<sup>79</sup> See E. Zeller, *Platonische Studien*, Tübingen 1839.

<sup>80</sup> Among others, Platon made references to Homer, e.g. to an excerpt from the *Iliad* (Vol. IX, § 497) – numbering of T. Murray from the edition published in 1924 in London.

<sup>81</sup> See O. Kern, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 23 ff.

<sup>82</sup> This is clearly visible in the *Laws*, e.g. Vol. X, § 905d; Vol. X, § 907d.

<sup>83</sup> See W.W. Jäger, *Humanizm i teologia*, Warszawa 1957, p. 48 ff.

<sup>84</sup> „Splendid of you both! But, in the first place, let us try to found the State by word” – see Platon, *Laws*, Vol. III, § 702e.

<sup>85</sup> E.g. by influencing the fate/fortune.

<sup>86</sup> See Platon, *Laws*, Vol. IV, § 709b.

<sup>87</sup> See *ibidem*.

active state? Taking into account the content of the *Laws*<sup>88</sup>, it can be assumed that such system would be the *theocracy*. This issue has been interpreted in a similar way in the literature<sup>89</sup>.

Considering the above, it can be pointed out that Plato's concept of the "common good" referred to a belief that the power in the state would be *entrusted* to God, because it resulted from the holistic view that the world was under God's control<sup>90</sup> and that control was exercised by politicians in *God's name*. Such a conclusion can be drawn not only from the study of the "*Laws*" but also, for example, from the study of "*Parmenides*"<sup>91</sup>. This led the philosopher to believe that the "common good" treated as ensuring the happiness of the state must be based on the *law*<sup>92</sup>. In this context, Plato's influence on world philosophy cannot be overestimated<sup>93</sup> and, although Plato is rarely referred to as the "creator of religious thought"<sup>94</sup> (as opposed, for example, to Socrates<sup>95</sup>), the analyses of the Platonism (in particular, those of the 1960s<sup>96</sup> and 1970s<sup>97</sup>) stress the *religious elements* in Plato's concept of the "common good" (with cultural characteristics, as that was the sense of the ancient "*paideia*")<sup>9899</sup>. The *religious character* of Plato's concept of the "common good" was emphasised by numerous commentators, including medieval writers<sup>100</sup> and, in addition, those of Islamic cultural origin<sup>101</sup>.

<sup>88</sup> See *ibidem*, § 713d–714a.

<sup>89</sup> See W.W. Jäger, *Humanizm...*, p. 50.

<sup>90</sup> See T. Taylor, *Introduction to the Philosophy and Writings of Plato*, London 2015, p. 2–57.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Platon, *Parmenides*, M. Tabak (ed.), New York 2015.

<sup>92</sup> Such a conclusion may be drawn, among others, from Vol. IV, § 713e.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. F. Baird, *Philosophic Classics: From Plato to Derrida*, New York 2010, p. 47–125.

<sup>94</sup> In the context of his theory of the "common good" as an expression of acceptance of God's governing of the world.

<sup>95</sup> See M. McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates*, Philadelphia 1999.

<sup>96</sup> E.g. the 1963 edition of Plato's "*Gorgias*", edited by L. Strauss (Chicago 1963).

<sup>97</sup> See P. Friedländer, *Plato: an Introduction*, Princeton 1973 (the text was created earlier, the 1969 edition is popular).

<sup>98</sup> See P. Tendera, *Platońska paideia w pismach Władysława Stróżewskiego*, "Estetyka i Krytyka" 2013, 1, p. 211–218.

<sup>99</sup> W. Jäger wrote in a similar way in 1944 – see W. Jäger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, Oxford 1944 [Vol. III, published in 1944, referred precisely to the relationship between the old Greek vision of culture and upbringing and Plato's statements].

<sup>100</sup> Cf. R. Lerner (ed.), *Averroes on Plato's "Republic"*, Ithaca 1974.

<sup>101</sup> Alfarabi, whose texts on this subject are also recalled today (e.g. *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* published in Ithaca in 2002, or *Political Regime and Summary of Plato's Laws* published in Ithaca in 2015), can serve as a typical example of such a writer.

Since Plato is one of those thinkers of the ancient world who is most frequently cited in various philosophical commentaries<sup>102</sup>, one can point to several contemporary publications discussing religious aspects of his “common good” theory. For example, J. Piper, a follower of Saint Thomas Aquinas, took on the task of proving that Plato’s idea was in fact *theocentric*<sup>103</sup>. Based on that, he pointed out that Plato may be considered a *pro-Christian thinker*; however, this is an opinion of an author wishing to reconcile the *deistic* elements of Plato’s *thoughts* with the *Roman-Catholic ideology* (in its scholastic form)<sup>104</sup>. Following this line of reasoning (not necessarily in relation to Thomism, but nevertheless religious<sup>105</sup>, representing an ideological conviction of the possibility to “reconcile” Platonism with Christianity<sup>106</sup>), certain works were published in which the concept of the “common good”, as well as a number of other elements<sup>107</sup>, were perceived as *mystical*<sup>108</sup>. This controversial view became popular at the end of the 1950s, along with the publication by the representatives of the “Tübingen School”<sup>109</sup> (e.g. K. Gaiser<sup>110</sup>, H-J. Krämer<sup>111</sup>) of texts proving that the actual teaching of Plato was passed on also orally, and not only in writing.

This issue is very complex and goes far beyond the scope of this publication; we may only point out that identifying Plato with mysticism is very controversial<sup>112</sup> and *does not* stem directly from his works<sup>113</sup>. It must be noted that this is an obvious consequence of accepting a standpoint according to which ideas transmitted orally are superior to those that have been preserved to this day in the written form<sup>114</sup>

<sup>102</sup> E.g. P. Sloterdijk, *Philosophical Temperaments: From Plato to Derrida*, New York 2013, p. 47–125.

<sup>103</sup> What has already been indicated in this text in relation to the interpretation of selected part of the *Laws*.

<sup>104</sup> See J. Piper, *„Divine Madness“: Plato’s Case Against Secular Humanism*, San Francisco 1995.

<sup>105</sup> E.g. N. Siniossoglou, *Plato and Theodoret: The Christian Appropriation of Platonic Philosophy and the Hellenic Intellectual Resistance*, Cambridge 2011.

<sup>106</sup> Of any obedience.

<sup>107</sup> Especially from the *Laws* and the *Republic*.

<sup>108</sup> E.g. A. Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, Oxford 2007, p. 2–16.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. J. Zachluber, *Albrecht Ritschl and the Tübingen School. A neglected link in the history of 19<sup>th</sup> century theology*, “Journal of the history of Modern Theology” 2011, 18, p. 51–70.

<sup>110</sup> See K. Gaiser, *Propetik und Paränese bei Platon*, Stuttgart 1959.

<sup>111</sup> See H.-J. Krämer, *Arete bei Platon und Aristoteles*, Heidelberg 1959.

<sup>112</sup> See H. Krämer, *Ku nowej interpretacji Platona*, “Studia Filozoficzne” 1987, 8, p. 3–18.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. K. Gaier, *Platons ungeschriebene Lehre*, Stuttgart 1963.

<sup>114</sup> More broadly: M. Wesoły, *Świadectwa niespisanej nauki Platona – cz. I, Traktat Arystotelesa „O dobru”*, “Meander” 1984, 4, p. 169–183; idem, *Świadectwa niespisanej nauki Platona – cz. II, Pryncypia a typy ontologiczne*, “Meander” 1984, 6, p. 281–292; idem, *Świadectwa niespisanej nauki Platona – cz. III*,

(as pointed out already by Aristotle with reference to Plato)<sup>115</sup>; the danger of such thinking lies in the fact that it could be used to justify nearly any idea<sup>116</sup>.

To this day, the above issue remains unsolved, and source literature features both the opponents of recognising the view that Plato's "unknown records" are superior (and thus, defending the viewpoint that Plato was a mystic in the religious context of his "common good" theory<sup>117</sup>), as well as its keen advocates. Leaving aside the question of the relationship between oral and written records and referring to Plato's ideas that have been written down, it can be pointed out that the religious nature<sup>118</sup> of his statements was also *attacked* by Aristotle; more precisely, Aristotle did not so much deny the component of divinity in the doctrine of the "common good", as he rejected Platonic *ideas*, including (especially) his *idea of the good*. Plato's works show that the author was fully aware<sup>119</sup> of the *interpretative difficulties* regarding this *idea*<sup>120</sup>, but it was Aristotle who, among others, attacked his concept of the "idea"<sup>121</sup>. The ideological conflict among the proponents of Platonism and Aristotelianism was in line with what M. Komorowski called<sup>122</sup> *a theology*: a Platonic theology<sup>123</sup> and the Aristotelian theology<sup>124</sup>. Taking as a starting point M. Komorowski's belief that "(...) *the late ancient tradition perceived Plato and Aristotle as theologians par excellence*"<sup>125</sup>, one should state that according to Plato, the *idea of the good* was created directly by God<sup>126</sup>, and the reference to both philosop-

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*Argumenty przeciwko pismu, "Meander"* 1988, 2–3, p. 79–93; idem, *Świadectwa niespisanej nauki Platona – cz. IV, Odsyłacze w dialogach do dialektyki pryncypiów, "Meander"* 1988, 7–8, p. 287–306.

<sup>115</sup> See Aristotle, *Physics*, Oxford 1930, Vol. IV, cz. II.

<sup>116</sup> The problem with this assumption lies with the impossibility of rejecting or excluding a given possibility from a set (on the basis of the following principle: it cannot be proved that "x" did not do "y" because there is no evidence that "x" could not have done it).

<sup>117</sup> See R. Ferber, *Die Unwissenheit des Philosophen oder Warum hat Platon die „ungeschriebene Lehre“ nicht geschrieben?*, St. Augustin 1991.

<sup>118</sup> See J. Rhodes, *Eros, Wisdom and Silence. Plato's Erotic Dialogues*, Columbia 2003, p. 113–182.

<sup>119</sup> See K. Gaiser, *Enigmatyczny wykład Platona „O Dobru”*, "Przegląd Filozoficzny" 1997, 3, p. 187–218.

<sup>120</sup> This is evidenced, for example, by the content of the *Republic* – e.g. Vol. VII, § 517b–517c.

<sup>121</sup> This view was reinforced even by the Soviet literature on the subject – cf. S. Kieczekian, *Nauka Arystotelesa o państwie i prawie*, Warszawa 1955, p. 75 ff.

<sup>122</sup> See M. Komorowski, *Pojęcie teologii w pismach Platona i Arystotelesa*, "Acta Universitatis Lodziensis" 2013, 26, p. 3–25.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. idem, *Proklos jako komentator Platona*, "Acta Universitatis Lodziensis" 2004, 16, p. 23–42.

<sup>124</sup> According to idem, in the late antiquity, Aristotle's "Metaphysics" functioned under the name: "Theology".

<sup>125</sup> See idem, *Pojęcie...*, p. 3.

<sup>126</sup> See Platon, *Państwo*, Vol. X, § 597a–597c.

hers as *theologians* is present also in the Polish literature (e.g. M. Kurdzialek<sup>127</sup>, J. Gajda-Krynicka<sup>128</sup>, B. Dembiński<sup>129</sup>).

As mentioned above, the concept of the “common good” includes religious elements in the sense that Plato considered the reality on Earth to be subordinate to God. This is particularly clear in the *Laws* where the philosopher advocates “trusting immortality” (which was to become a *law*)<sup>130</sup> for the sake of the welfare of the state: those exercising public authority should be guided by God’s will in order to strengthen “the common good” of the entire *polis*<sup>131</sup>. In his *Symposium*, Plato brought the vision of the relationship between God and man closer, picturing it as a dichotomous exchange of behaviour, due to the fact that God does not contact people on his own, nor do people contact God<sup>132</sup>. The exchange referred to the behaviour of people towards gods<sup>133</sup> and the fulfilment of the will of the *mediators*<sup>134</sup>. It is the “mediators” between God and the humanity who have given rise to numerous interpretative controversies<sup>135</sup>. In practice, the role of these mediators was very complex throughout the entire Platonic philosophical system. However, links between the word *daimon* and demonism have been discussed since ancient times<sup>136</sup>, and have become the subject of numerous theological reflections even in the modern period<sup>137</sup>.

Since Plato emphasised polytheism<sup>138</sup>, some of the “mediators” play a more important role than others, which is especially important for people as members of an *ideal polis*, built according to the principles of the “common good”. One of

<sup>127</sup> E.g. M. Kurdzialek, *Wokół Arystotelesowego określenia filozofii pierwszej jako teologii*, “Roczniki Filozoficzne Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego” 1991–1992, 39–40, p. 57–64.

<sup>128</sup> See J. Gajda-Krynicka, *Teologie starożytne. Teologia filozoficzna jako filozofia pierwsza*, [in:] I. Deca (ed.), *Na skrzydłach wiary i rozumu ku prawdzie*, Wrocław 1999, p. 105–128.

<sup>129</sup> See B. Dembiński, *Teologia Platońskiego Timajosa i Fileba i jej kontynuacja w naukach niepisanych*, [in:] A. Olejarczyk et al. (ed.), *Kolokwia Platońskie*, Wrocław 2004, p. 67–71.

<sup>130</sup> E.g. Plato, *Laws*, op. cit., Vol. IV, § 713e.

<sup>131</sup> Ibidem, Vol. IV, § 715c–715d.

<sup>132</sup> E.g. Plato, *Symposium*, § 203a [the twelve-volume edition of Plato’s works referred to above is still in use. The “Symposium” is featured in the 9th volume of this publication, translated by N. Fowler and published in London in 1925.]

<sup>133</sup> E.g. prayers, sacrifices.

<sup>134</sup> W zasadzie, były to „duchy pośredniczące” (tzw. *daimones*).

<sup>135</sup> E.g. L. Amir, *Plato’s theory of Love: Rationality as Passion*, “Practical Philosophy” 2001, 11, p. 6–12.

<sup>136</sup> E.g. Proculus wrote that “*daimon*” does not denote a demon, but a “semi-god”. This is according to a classic translation by T. Taylor entitled *On the theology of Plato* [six books published in London in 1816 together with additional materials, e.g. the seventh book entitled: *Proculus’ elements of theology*].

<sup>137</sup> E.g. J. Swinton, *A critical dissertation concerning the words daímon and daimónion: occasion’d by two late enquiries into the meaning of demoniacs in the New Testament*, London 1738.

<sup>138</sup> See Plato, *Symposium*, op. cit., § 203a.

such “mediators”, more important than others<sup>139</sup>, was Eros. According to the contemporary concepts regarding the role of Eros, his actions should not be associated *solely* with a sexual drive, but also with his role as a “mediator” between God and man<sup>140</sup>. This problem is discussed in a number of publications (e.g. by H. Yunis<sup>141</sup>, M. Groneberg<sup>142</sup>, J. Rhodes<sup>143</sup>); by accepting such argumentation, we may also agree with what O. Kern<sup>144</sup> has indicated, i.e. that the appearance of the “mediators” makes it possible to refer to the Platonic system (in general) as a “religion”<sup>145</sup>. It is not possible to decide here whether this is a correct conclusion or perhaps a view expressed too hastily; however, as early as at the end of the 19th century<sup>146</sup> and in the 1920s<sup>147</sup>, the idea that at least some elements of Plato’s cohesive theory can be described as a “religion” became widespread. This allows for a completely new interpretation of the theory of the “common good”, which, above all, should be seen from the perspective of the *axiology* of Plato’s philosophy. This conclusion also overlaps (at least to a large extent) with the vision of happiness of this philosopher<sup>148</sup>, often considered to be a Gnostic<sup>149</sup>.

## Conclusion

Characterising Plato’s concept of the “common good” from a religious point of view is not an easy task. The difficulty arises from the fact that contemporary studies rarely discuss this aspect, much more often attempting to tailor theories of particular philosophers to the interpretation of Plato’s theory (in line with an appropriate ideological orientation, of course)<sup>150</sup>. This results in strangely contra-

<sup>139</sup> Because he led directly to the *Truth*.

<sup>140</sup> See P. Ludwig, *Eros and Polis Desire and Community in Greek Political Theory*, Cambridge 2002.

<sup>141</sup> See H. Yunis, *Eros in Plato’s Phaedrus and the Shape of Greek Rhetoric*, “Arion” 2005, 1, p. 101–123.

<sup>142</sup> See M. Groneberg, *Myth and Science...*

<sup>143</sup> See J. Rhodes, *Eros, Wisdom and Silence. Plato’s Erotic Dialogues*, Columbia 2003.

<sup>144</sup> See O. Kern, *Die Religion der...*, p. 13–15.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 29 ff.

<sup>146</sup> E.g. K. Löschhorn, *Kritische Studien zur platonischen und christlichen Ethik*, 1880.

<sup>147</sup> E.g. H. Meyer, *Platon und die aristotelische Ethik*, Monachium 1919.

<sup>148</sup> Cf. Plato, *Laws*, Vol. X, § 888b.

<sup>149</sup> E.g. P. Tite, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition*, “Journal of Biblical Literature” 2004, 123, p. 580–584.

<sup>150</sup> E.g. A. Farndell, *Gardens of Philosophy: Ficino on Plato*, London 2006.

dictory positions, such as the recognition of Plato as a Gnostic<sup>151</sup> on the one hand, and the identification of his influence on the Hebrew Bible (in the legal aspect), on the other hand<sup>152</sup>. The theory of the “common good” should not be viewed in isolation from Plato’s “religious” vision, but some issues raised in the text, such as, for example, the recognition of this system (in part or in full) as a kind of “religion” or “theology”, remain unresolved. The latest volume of “The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition”<sup>153</sup> shows a wide range of interpretations of Platonic and neo-Platonic theories in the contemporary philosophy. The visions of the “common good”, as presented by this philosopher in the *Republic* and significantly supplemented in the *Laws*, are sometimes embedded<sup>154</sup> in the tradition of a philosophical reflection (e.g. naturalism<sup>155</sup>, idealism<sup>156</sup>, etc.) without a deeper understanding of their essence. Plato’s concept is wrongly considered to be merely an expression of authoritarianism, which *significantly limits* the possibility of its in-depth examination.

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<sup>151</sup> E.g. T. Lambert, *The Gnostic Notebook*, New York 2016, Vol. III, p. 2–41.

<sup>152</sup> E.g. R. Gmirkin, *Plato and the Creation of the Hebrew Bible*, New York 2016, p. 9–73.

<sup>153</sup> Year 2016, 10.

<sup>154</sup> E.g. J. Porter, *Plato and the Platonic Tradition*, “The Yearbook of Comparative Literature” 2010, 56, p. 75–103.

<sup>155</sup> See B. Linsky et al., *Naturalized Platonism vs. Platonized Naturalism*, “The Journal of Philosophy” 1995, 10, p. 525–555.

<sup>156</sup> See J. Muirhead, *Reviewed Work: The Platonic Tradition in Anglo-Saxon Philosophy: Studies in the History of Idealism in England and America*, “The Journal of Philosophy” 1932, 29, p. 552–554.