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Greek Models of Life up to Plato's Philosophy and its Influence on the Christian Life in the Early Church

Abstract:

This article deals with the issue of ancient Greek models of life up to the time of Plato's philosophy. The author presents in a brief way the ideals in the writing of Homer's and Hesiod's, in the Pericleus' speech from the Peloponnesian war, the Spartans, Pythagoreans and Plato's model of life and education. Next he tries to describe how and which of these models were assimilated by Christians in the first centuries and which were rejected. The purpose of this article is to show how important ancient Greek culture and philosophy was for Christians not to mention the Greek language in which the New Testament was written. Understanding the development of theology in the early Greek Church requires knowledge of ideals and values which were important for people before accepting the Jesus Gospel.

INTRODUCTION

Any proper understanding of the historical development of theology in the early and later Church requires at least a basic knowledge of the environment in which it began, that is, the social and cultural conditions. The same applies to the propagation of the models of Christian life in the first centuries. In this article we will try to search for the models of life in ancient Greece up to the time of Plato. Of course, it is impossible to provide a complete account of even the major contributors to the way of life led by the people of antiquity in a brief work. To be sure, it is enough to read a short book written by Tadeusz Sinko and Przemysław Paczkowski's[1] monograph in which he presents Plato's and Aristotle's ideals of human life. Our aim is to describe only the most important ideas which shaped the models of life in Greece before Plato and his writings.

In this spirit, I begin by briefly describing the characteristics of the pre-platonic models of life, and after that I present a more detailed account of what Plato proposed and how it was assimilated by Christians in the first centuries. There is no doubt that Greek thought has strongly influenced the Mediterranean Basin even during pre-Christian times. This was due, primarily, to the expeditions of Alexander the Great and the expansion of Rome. Ancient Greek philosophy and culture has always been considered one of the most significant achievements of man. Together with Roman culture it gave rise to European culture in its general and vast meaning. Of all the ancient cultures Greek is closest to us in likeness and is far more attractive to us than any of the other ancient cultures. Christian civilization also arose from the Greco-Roman tradition.[2] The flowering of literature, linguistics studies,[3]

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[1]   Cf. T. Sinko, *Doskonały Grek i Rzymianin*, Lwów 1939; P. Paczkowski, *Filozoficzne modele życia w klasycznym antyku (IV w. p.n.e.)*, Rzeszów 2005, on page 181 he gives the title in English: *Philosophical Models of Life in the Classical Antiquity (Fourth Century B.C.)*.

[2]   Cf. St. Stabryła, *Antyk i współczesna szkoła*, Nowy Filomata 16 (2012 nr 1) p. 41. Christian inspiration in the ancient world and the trends of development in ancient Christian ethos. – cf. Sz. Pieszczoch in: *Kulturotwórcza inspiracja i wpływ chrześcijaństwa na rozwój antyku*, Poznań 1992, pp. 33–156.

[3]   Cf. H. Wolanin, *Słowotwórstwo w myśli językoznawczej starożytnej Grecji. Od Homera do Dionizjusza Traka*, PAU, Prace Komisji Filologii Klasycznej 24, Kraków 1996, p. 7–24. 43.

theater[4] (Homer, Hesiod, Sappho, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes) and art (the architecture of temples and other buildings, sculptures, and painting), are usually listed among the specific cultural achievements of the ancient Greeks. Also attributed to Ancient Greece is the beginning of critical science due to its distinct critical character as opposed to the uncritical acceptance of mythical claims, the development of specialized disciplines, including medicine, the father of which is considered to be Hippocrates, and the democratic ideals to which we aspire to today. For Christians the Greek language was and is very important, because in the first centuries in all the Greek churches the Septuagint was the accepted version of the Old Testament and the entire New Testament was written in Greek. The Septuagint had been produced in the third century bc in Alexandria near Egypt, where close to a million Jews lived.[5] The translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek needed to express and assimilate the Jewish tradition which inspired the Greek and later the Latin culture. There was another element that was very important to European civilization, that being Roman law, which was given to the ancient world by the Romans. To use a metaphor, we can say that European civilization in its complexity is based on four hills: Sinai, Golgotha, Acropolis, and Capitol. But in this article I will try to climb and understand only one of them: Acropolis.

This study is not concerned with the mutual influence of Jewish and Gentile tradition, neither is it concerned with Greek terminology, that is, the philosophical deliberation, contemplation, or the etymology of specific words but rather how Greek thought has shaped the image of man. It is, instead, a basic study that can help to explain what was new about Christianity, what had been assimilated and what had been rejected from the Greek way of life and philosophy. Therefore, I will not discuss the word παιδεία which the Romans translated as *humanitas* expressing in Latin the Hellenistic ideal of man,[6] and which specifies, both the educational process as well as its final outcome because

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[4]   Cf. S. Srebrny, *Co zawdzięczamy kulturze świata antycznego*, in: *Teatr grecki i polski*, elab. Sz. Gąsowski, introd. J. Łanowski, Warszawa 1984, p. 184 –201.

[5]   Cf. H. Chadwick, *The Early Church*, Penguin Books, London 1978, p. 10.

[6]   Cf. A. Świderkówna, *Hellenika. Wizerunek epoki od Aleksandra do Augusta*, Warszawa 1978, p. 325. *Paideia, humanitas* and *cultura* is discussed by Rev. L. Rzodkiewicz, *Jezus Chrystus w kulturze antycznej*, Legnica 1999, p. 43ff.

the main interest of this study is not philological. Besides Werner Jaeger analyses this word in his three-volume work, *Paideia, The Ideals of Greek Culture*.[7] I am not concerned here with the meaning of the word ἀρετή (virtue[8]), or the Greek *politeia*, which expresses the ideal of living in a community *polis* (in today's terminology we speak of the Jewish, Greek, or Christian *politeia*).[9] Similarly, I am not concerned with words derived from Μοῦσα (Muse, ability, art), Μουσεῖον (Temple, the seat of the Muses, the philosophical school, and the library in Alexandria), μουσική (art, poetry, literature, science, music), μουσικός (musical, elegance) or any words with contradictory meaning, for example ἀμουσία (ignorance) or ἄμουσος. These words characterize the Greek world and therefore must be mentioned but this study is limited specifically to the philosophical aspects which can be understood as a way of living and thinking.[10]

It is worth mentioning that the great men and the creators of Greek civilization were not the prophets of gods, nor did they act on their behalf, instead they independently shaped and promoted a particular model of life. Werner Jaeger writes of the Greek trinity consisting of the poet (*poietes*), statesman (*politikos*) and sage (*sophos*), which expressed the highest acclaim for a Greek and the leading factor in the development of the nation by the already mentioned *paideia* and *Politeia*.[11]

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[7]   Jaeger, W. *Paideia*; *The Ideals of Greek Culture* Werner Jaeger v. i–iii, Oxford, New York 1939–1944.

[8]   Cf. T. Zieliński, *Historia kultury antycznej w zwięzłym wykładzie*, Warszawa – Kraków 1937, t. i, p. 109; bibliography to the word *arete* – cf. *Repertorio bibliográfico de la lexicografía griega*, ed. P. Boned Colera, rew. J. Rodríguez Somolinos, Madrid 1998, p. 193–194. The meaning of Latin word *humanitas* and its relation to Greek *paideia* – cf. Janusz Sondel, *Antyczne dziedzictwo we współczesnej kulturze polskiej*, in: Prace Komisji Filologii Klasycznej PAU, num. 46, ed. Stanisław Stabryła, PAU, Wydział Filologiczny, Kraków 2015, 86–88.

[9]   Cf. J. Iluk, *Żydowska politeja i Kościół w Imperium Rzymskim u schyłku antyku*, t. i: *Jana Chryzostoma kapłana Antiochii Mowy przeciwko judaizantom i Żydom*, Gdańsk 2006, 21.

[10]   Cf. G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytnej*, Lublin 1999, t. iii, p. 551–552; cf. also K. Kumaniecki, *Historia kultury starożytnej Grecji i Rzymu*. Warszawa 1965, p. 410–412; Ch. N. Cochrane, *Chrześcijaństwo i kultura antyczna*, trans. G. Pianko, Warszawa 1960, p. 4; J. Legowicz, *Historia filozofii starożytnej Grecji i Rzymu*. Warszawa 1973, 384.

[11]   Cf. W. Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, t. i–iii, Oxford – New York 1939–1944, p. 28–30.

1. Homer, Hesiod and Democracy According to Pericles' Words

During the *archaic period*, (from the establishment of the first *polis* to the Persian wars,) literary activity led Homer (eighth century BCE) and Hesiod (seventh century BCE) to create the first literary genres (εἰδη, γένη)[12]. Homer's works the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* lie at the beginning of European intellectual culture.[13] Werner Jaeger presents Homer as an educator throughout Greece, who emphasized the harmony of nature and human life in a patriarchal system.[14] The Homeric concept of *moiry* (μοῖρα – fate, destiny – μοῖραι – personified goddess of fate) as well as the synonymous concept *aisa* gave direction to Greek ethical thinking becoming „the principle of all subsequent Greek philosophical ethics."[15]

Hesiod[16] who incorporated Homer's conception of *Moiry* into his works (*Works and Days, Theogony, Shield of Heracles*) stressed the importance of the law (in his opinion one does not profit from the illegally gained good) as well as a close relationship between justice and work, which does not dishonor a person, and although it is difficult, is the only way to *arete* and happiness (*Works and Days* 292; 311). The *arete* later became the ideal of human life for all great philosophers as well as the basis of human holiness in the early church.[17] In 2 Thess 3: 10–11, speaks about work saying, „if any would not work, neither should he eat." Naturally, the early Christian concept of work was also a continuation of the Jewish way of life presented in the Old Testament, for

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[12]   Cf. Plato, Laws III, 700a ff; Aristotle, *Poetics* 1, 1447a 7; *Rhetorics* 1, 2, 1358a 32.

[13]   Cf. W. Jaeger, *Paideia*, Warszawa 1962, t. 1, p. 67–87; B. Patzek, *Homer und seine Zeit*, München 2003.

[14]   Cf. M.Kosznicki, Obraz ojca-filozofa w późniejszych mowacg Temistiusza, in: Społeczeństwo i religia w świecie antycznym, rd. Sz. Olszaniec, P. Wojciehowski, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikoja Kopernika, Toruń 2010, 401 nota 1; cf. also R. F. Hock, *Homer in Greco-Roman Education*, in: Dennis MacDonald (pub.), *Mimesis and Intertextuality in Antiquity and Christianity*, Harrisbourg 2001, 65ff; A. Baron, *Świętość a ideały człowieka*, Kraków 2013, p. 112.

[15]   A. Krokiewicz, *Zarys filozofii greckiej*, Warszawa 1971, p. 40.

[16]   Cf. Hesiod, *Theogony*, introduction and commentary by M. L. West, Oxford 1966; Hesiod, *Works and Days*, introduction and commentary by M. L. West, Oxford 1978; Hesiod, *Theogony, and Works and Days*, English translation and commentary by M. L. West, Oxford 1988; Hezjod, *Narodziny bogów (Theogonia), Prace i dni, Tarcza*, trans. J. Łanowski, Warszawa 1999.

[17]   Cf. A. Baron, *Świętość a ideały człowieka*, Kraków 2013, p. 415.

example, the deuterocanonical Book of Sirach, which the early church in the East and West (Didache, Clement of Rome, Iraenaeus and Tertulian) considered as canonical. The last book of the New Testament clearly states that in the end every man will receive reward according his work (cf. Rev 22: 12). Similarly the desire to be happy (happiness) shaped Greek culture (*eudaimonia*) and Christianity (for example Matt 5: 1ss). This influence can easily be seen in European culture even today. We are able to talk about culture based on the realization of this ideal in the life of a particular person up until the twentieth century when the distortions of fascism (with the upsetting words "Arbeit macht frei") and communism (with the 'religious' cult of work and corruption) appear. Even if the same work and human activity is emphasized in different ideologies and religions, the motif can be different: to become rich, to have power over the others, or as in Christianity, to express love toward one's neighbor.

Greek social life was based on a patriarchal system as were the majority of contemporary societies in the Mediterranean Basin except for Egypt where the status of women was high and equal to that of men. The position of women in the first century differed in reality from culture to culture.[18] In Greece, the role of woman was in practice limited to domestic life, although they could participate in religious ceremonies. In an article about Marilyn Arthur's book "From Medusa to Cleopatra: Women in the Ancient World,"[19] Kimberly M. Radek writes:

> 'Arthur traces the development of the *polis*, a kind of democracy within ancient Greece, which gave men more equal rights-transitioning from an aristocracy where much power was held by relatively few privileged men-and placed greater restrictions on women than they had previously known. Arthur explains that as a middle class arose, the household unit, or *oikos*, became more important. The nuclear family, which had previously been only a biological and social unit, became a political and economic unit. The functions that women traditionally fulfilled, that of wives and mothers, became defined as a 'necessity and a duty, and the failure to perform them had legal and moral consequences' (85).

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[18]   Cf. E. M. Tetlow, The Status of Women in Greek, Roman and Jewish Society, in: *Women and Ministry in the New Testament,* Paulist Press, 1980 pp. 5 – 29.

[19]   Cf. In C. Koonz & R. Bridenthal (eds.). Becoming Visible: Women in European History. 2nd edition (Boston 1987), 79–105.

Women were prohibited, according to Arthur, from ever 'achieving the status of fully autonomous beings' (86). A woman throughout her life was the legal ward of either her father or husband; she could not inherit property or engage in any but the most small scale business transactions. The children belonged to the husband, and adultery was seen as a crime against the state since it corrupted the *oikos*; a woman found in an adulterous liaison would lose her citizenship or be executed. Men also suffered penalties if they committed adultery, but they had many legal sexual outlets: highly trained courtesans, male and female prostitutes, and young male citizens. Most Grecian women could not even leave their homes without permission from their fathers or husbands.[20]

The Christian faith appeared in Greece under this type of societal condition and did not diminish the position of women. In the Church, women found a higher social position at least in terms of the law.

Greeks were totally *polis*-city-state oriented practically until the time of the conquests of Alexander the Great, which resulted in the expansion of Greek culture to what is present day Pakistan; and is reflected in the *Hellenistic Period*, which lasted from the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE to 30 BCE. Hellenistic culture influenced the later Roman Empire to the extent that after the conquest of Greece, everything Greek became the fashion in Rome. The clash of different cultures caused such significant changes that Giovanni Reale says that it transformed Hellenic culture into Hellenism.[21] In this way Greek culture in the form of Hellenization after the conquest of Alexander the Great, became the basis of Mediterranean culture through the following centuries of Roman rule and, through the Roman Empire, influenced the shape of European culture.

The early church nominated bishops (*episcopoi*) in the cities only and each city could only have one bishop.[22] The practice of nominating country bishops (*chorepiscopoi*) was brief and local, and quickly disappeared because they were not real bishops as they only held the status of clergy.[23]

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[20]   Cf. http://www2.ivcc.edu/gen2002/greek_and_roman_women.htm (September 3rd 2015).

[21]   Cf. G. Reale, *Myśl starożytna*, Lublin 2003, p. 312–313.

[22]   Cf. Nicaea I (325), c. 8.

[23]   Cf. Nicaea II (787), c. 5 and 14.

Thucydides describing the Peloponnesian War left us the Pericles sermon in which we read about Greek (Athenian) democracy and style of life:

> II, 37, 1: Our constitution does not copy the laws of neighboring states; we are rather a pattern to others than imitators ourselves. Its administration favors the many instead of the few; this is why it is called a democracy. If we look to the laws, they afford equal justice to all in their private differences; if to social standing, advancement in public life falls to reputation for capacity, class considerations not being allowed to interfere with merit; nor again does poverty bar the way, if a man is able to serve the state, he is not hindered by the obscurity of his condition.
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> 37, 2 The freedom which we enjoy in our government extends also to our ordinary life. There, far from exercising a jealous surveillance over each other, we do not feel called upon to be angry with our neighbor for doing what he likes, or even to indulge in those injurious looks which cannot fail to be offensive, although they inflict no positive penalty.
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> 37, 3 But all this ease in our private relations does not make us lawless as citizens. Against this fear is our chief safeguard, teaching us to obey the magistrates and the laws, particularly such as regard the protection of the injured…
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> 38, 1 Further, we provide plenty of means for the mind to refresh itself from business. We celebrate games and sacrifices all the year round, and the elegance of our private establishments forms a daily source of pleasure and helps to banish the spleen;
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> 39, 1 If we turn to our military policy, there also we differ from antagonists. We throw open our city to the world, and never by alien acts exclude foreigners from any opportunity of learning or observing, although the eyes of an enemy may occasionally profit by our liberality; trusting less in system and policy than to the native spirit of our citizens; while in education, where our rivals from their very cradles by a painful discipline seek after manliness, at Athens we live exactly as we please, and yet are just as ready to encounter every legitimate danger.[24]

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[24]   Cf. *The Peloponnesian War*, II, 37, 1–39, 1: Χρώμεθα γὰρ πολιτείᾳ οὐ ζηλούσῃ τοὺς τῶν πέλας νόμους, παράδειγμα δὲ μᾶλλον αὐτοὶ ὄντες τισὶν ἢ μιμούμενοι ἑτέρους. καὶ ὄνομα μὲν διὰ τὸ μὴ ἐς ὀλίγους ἀλλ᾽ ἐς πλείονας οἰκεῖν δημοκρατία κέκληται· μέτεστι δὲ κατὰ μὲν τοὺς νόμους πρὸς τὰ ἴδια διάφορα πᾶσι τὸ ἴσον, κατὰ δὲ τὴν

This ideal image of democracy became a challenge and never was fully achieved. Even in Athens it was practiced for only hundred years after Pericles' speech, but what is important is that democracy became a model of social and political life and people in many countries of our time also want to obtain this. The described democracy is based on the political and social freedom and equality.

2. The Spartans

At this point the Spartans, whose origins date back to the twelfth century bce, must be mentioned.[25] They imposed a strict and uniform life for all based on an education process from the third century bce known as *agoge* (from ἀγωγή – to lead; from ἀγωγεύς – to steer a horse by its bridle) described as the Spartan education. While the purpose of the nation-state had always been the Greek *paideia*, the Spartan education completely subjugated the interests of the individual to those of the state. It seemed to bear fruit in the years 720–576 bce, when more than

ἀξίωσιν, ὡς ἕκαστος ἔν τῳ εὐδοκιμεῖ, οὐκ ἀπὸ μέρους τὸ πλέον ἐς τὰ κοινὰ ἢ ἀπ᾽ ἀρετῆς προτιμᾶται, οὐδ᾽ αὖ κατὰ πενίαν, ἔχων γέ τι ἀγαθὸν δρᾶσαι τὴν πόλιν, ἀξιώματος ἀφανείᾳ κεκώλυται. 37.2 ἐλευθέρως δὲ τά τε πρὸς τὸ κοινὸν πολιτεύομεν καὶ ἐς τὴν πρὸς ἀλλήλους τῶν καθ᾽ ἡμέραν ἐπιτηδευμάτων ὑποψίαν, οὐ δι᾽ ὀργῆς τὸν πέλας, εἰ καθ᾽ ἡδονήν τι δρᾷ, ἔχοντες, οὐδὲ ἀζημίους μέν, λυπηρὰς δὲ 37.3 τῇ ὄψει ἀχθηδόνας προστιθέμενοι. ἀνεπαχθῶς δὲ τὰ ἴδια προσομιλοῦντες τὰ δημόσια διὰ δέος μάλιστα οὐ παρανομοῦμεν, τῶν τε αἰεὶ ἐν ἀρχῇ ὄντων ἀκροάσει καὶ τῶν νόμων, καὶ μάλιστα αὐτῶν ὅσοι τε ἐπ᾽ ὠφελίᾳ τῶν ἀδικουμένων κεῖνται καὶ ὅσοι ἄγραφοι ὄντες αἰσχύνην ὁμολογουμένην φέρουσιν. 38.1 Καὶ μὴν καὶ τῶν πόνων πλείστας ἀναπαύλας τῇ γνώμῃ ἐπορισάμεθα, ἀγῶσι μέν γε καὶ θυσίαις διετησίοις νομίζοντες, ἰδίαις δὲ κατασκευαῖς εὐπρεπέσιν, ὧν καθ᾽ ἡμέραν ἡ τέρψις… 39.1 Διαφέρομεν δὲ καὶ ταῖς τῶν πολεμικῶν μελέταις τῶν ἐναντίων τοῖσδε. τήν τε γὰρ πόλιν κοινὴν παρέχομεν, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ὅτε ξενηλασίαις ἀπείργομέν τινα ἢ μαθήματος ἢ θεάματος, ὃ μὴ κρυφθὲν ἄν τις τῶν πολεμίων ἰδὼν ὠφεληθείη, πιστεύοντες οὐ ταῖς παρασκευαῖς τὸ πλέον καὶ ἀπάταις ἢ τῷ ἀφ᾽ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν ἐς τὰ ἔργα εὐψύχῳ· καὶ ἐν ταῖς παιδείαις οἱ μὲν ἐπιπόνῳ ἀσκήσει εὐθὺς νέοι ὄντες τὸ ἀνδρεῖον μετέρχονται, ἡμεῖς δὲ ἀνειμένως διαιτώμενοι οὐδὲν. English in: London, J. M. Dent; New York, E. P. Dutton. 1910.

²⁵   Brief discussion on the history of Sparta in J. Wolski, *Historia powszechna. Starożytność*, Warszawa 1971², p. 175–182; R. Kulesza, *Starożytna Sparta*, Poznań 2003, p. 11–36 (Spartan history). p. 67–74 (Spartan education), the newest biography; history – H.-I. Marrou, *Historia wychowania w starożytności*, Warszawa 1969, p. 45–59; W. Jaeger, *Paideia*, Warszawa 1962, t. 1, p. 106–126; R. Kulesza, *Wychowanie spartańskie w V–IV wieku p.n.e*, Rozprawy z Dziejów Oświaty, 2002, z. 4.

half of the winners of the Olympic games came from Sparta. Plato affirms this in *The Republic*.[26] A good analogy is the success of the athletes from East Germany and other totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century. The private life of the Spartan citizen was limited to a minimum. Everything – from birth to death – was subject to scrutiny by the state. Every infant was subject to inspection and if it was week or sick, was sentenced to death. Similarly, young men who could not withstand the severe rigors of exercise died. Death for ones country was highly valued by the Spartans, which can later be seen in the modern understanding of national patriotism. Werner Jaeger describes the Spartan education using the poems of Tyrtaeus, in which the „Homeric ideal of heroic *arete* melted in the heroism of love of country."[27] A man was to fulfill his obligation as a citizen-soldier to the degree that he would either return from a war alive and victorious or dead. Deserters from the army, known as *tresantes*, lost their right of citizenship and were severely punished, and there were similar punishments for any sign of disobedience. Although the Spartan education led to solidarity through emotional ties, the system was based on violence and was essentially a police-totalitarian system.

3. The Pythagoreans

The Pythagoreans, who relied on a model of human ethics, created one of the first known schools.[28] It was an organized group of people, who live according to strictly adopted rules and to which not all were accepted.[29] The acquisition of knowledge was not an objective for them but was a means by which to lead the life promoted by the school. This was later called βίος θεωρητικός (the contemplative life), which amounted to the attainment of knowledge and the contemplation of truth, and it was the way to purify the body and soul. This type of life

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[26]   Cf. H.-I. Marrou, *Historia wychowania w starożytności*, Warszawa 1969, p. 56.

[27]   W. Jaeger, *Paideia*, Warszawa 1962, t. I, p. 119.

[28]   The Pythagoreans and Platonism – cf. my article *Cultura animi w myśli greckiej (platonizm, arystotelizm, epikureizm, stoicyzm, medio- i neoplatonizm)*, in: Prace Komisji Filologii Klasycznej PAU, nr 46, ed. S. Stabryła, PAU, Wydział Filologiczny, Kraków 2015, p. 100–106.

[29]   G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytnej*, Lublin 2002, t. V, p. 467–469.

finds its expression in the Gorgias and *Phaedo* of Plato.[30] The achievements of medicine were used for the purification of the body, not magic, and music and a world of digits consisting of a system of numbers and geometry were used for the purification of the soul.

Pythagoreanism took some Orphic beliefs, but clearly modified them. While Orphism recognized that the only way of purification was to participate in the sacred rights through which man is united with the gods, Pythagoreanism was concerned with the knowledge of spiritual mysteries and philosophical knowledge. To emphasize the necessity of making a choice Pythagoreans symbolically used the letter Y as a sign of junctions and crossroads, where each person must decide how to continue his life, whether they will choose the way of the good or bad.[31] Pythagoreanism can be described as the cult of knowledge and learning in the service of man's ethical excellence. The role of numbers in life is well known to us in the modern digital world.

4. Platonism

The work of Plato (428 / 427–347) has left its mark on ancient thinking like no other. It has, through the mediation of neo-Platonism, influenced, among others, Christian writers in the East (Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius) and the West (Marius Victorinus, Augustine of Hippo).[32] This is particularly due to the discovery of the supra-

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[30] G. Reale, *Myśl starożytna*, Lublin 2003, p. 49.

[31] Cf. W. Jaeger, *Scripta Minora*, Rome 1960, t. I, p. 140ff.

[32] Cf. A. Baron, *Neoplatońska idea Boga*, Kraków 2005, p. 192–196. Marsilio Ficino (born 1433 – died 1499) at the Academy of Florence „always kept a torch lit" before the image of Plato; and one of the most outstanding interpreters of Plato's works, R. Acri, called him „the pagan prophet of Christ" (cf. G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytnej*, Lublin 1997, t. II, p. 266), G. Reale and points out that with the discovery of the supra-natural world Plato is rightly hailed as the creator of Western theology, however he specifies that Plato did not come to the concept of God as a person (*ibidem*, p. 357–358). Plato speaks of the persecution of the righteous by the unrighteous, the poor by the wealthy and powerful, „They say that injustice pays better than justice, for the most part." (cf. *The Republic*, II 364a; cf. 361–364). Plato was aware of the ethical deterioration of many people, among whom he lived, but that does not change the fact that he remained adamant that justice was something good and injustice was evil. (*The Republic* II, 367b; cf. 365–366). Plato's view of the ideal man is that he also has shadows, even though he writes that the soul and life of man are of a divine nature. (cf. *Phaedo* 95c; 106d), that

natural world by Plato, which „is a milestone in the development of philosophy."[33] He calls this the „*deuteros plous*" or „second sailing."[34] In his continuous search for the truth Plato applied a new method to his works. He debunked arguments in the form of discussions and began the critical exploration of the theory of principles and ideas. He distinguished between two types of beings as, things visible and things invisible, which were later accepted by Aristotle, Philo, and even the Christians as is reflected in their Creeds that they believe in things visible and invisible.[35] Plato's theory of knowledge, dialectic, and the brilliant „allegory of the cave" (*The Republic*, VII, 514a ff.), in which Plato notes that people only have direct access to a small part of reality, like people who are inside a cave and only know the external world in the form of „shadows" cast upon the wall of the cave. Similarly, modern scholars examine the information coming from the universe to Earth from millions of light-years away, in other words, information about the world, which no longer exists or that has long been different.

a) The Domination of the Spirit

An important factor in the Platonic conception of man is the above mentioned *paideia*, which Plato integrated into his hierarchy of values: first the soul, then things spiritual, virtue and knowledge, then the body and its vital goods, and finally external goods such as wealth and possession of things.[36] These serve the cardinal virtues: prudence, courage, moderation and justice.[37] In the dialogue *Lysis* Plato talks about friendship, in *Symposium* – about love. He creates a work about courage (Laches) about wisdom (Teages) and about virtue (Menon). Plato distinguished three parts or functions of the soul: appetitive, spirited, and the rational,[38] and as such it entered into Christian thought. He

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an in *The Republic* he speaks about the killing of invalids, the mentally ill, and children begotten in a way that is contrary to the rule of the age (*The Republic* V, 460c; 461c).

[33]   G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytnej*, Lublin 1997, t. II, p. 19.

[34]   Plato *Symposium* 219a; *The Republic* 7, 519b.

[35]   Cf. i.e. Wł. Stróżewski, *Wykłady o Platonie*, Uniwersytet Jagielloński 1992, p. 7, where we read that Plato was „one of the greatest, if not the greatest among philosophers."

[36]   Cf. Platon, *Laws V*, 726a–729a.

[37]   *The Republic* IV, 433b: σωφροσύνη, ἀνδρεία, φρόνησις, δικαιοσύνη.

[38]   Cf. Plato, *Laws* V, 726a–729a.

also presents an allegorical image of the soul in the form of two winged horses and a charioteer pulling man in different directions (cf. *Phaedrus*, 246a–b). The horses represent two powers (cf. *Phaedrus* 237d–238b): lust for pleasure and pride (ὕβρις) and reason (σωφροσύνη). If a person can tame them (cf. *Phaedrus*, 247b), that is master and develop himself, he will be the very best. It is in this way that Plato proposes man to master his desire (cf. *Phaedrus*, 237d–238d). Many Christian writers knew of this image, including Clement of Alexandria.[39] This is reflected in the Christian understanding of the model life as well as anywhere the influence of Platonism reached. In this way, Plato emphasized the primacy of spiritual values and combined them with what amounted to an intelligible intellectual model of man.

According to Plato, if the soul lived justly, it would be rewarded and if it lived so unjustly that it became incurable, it would receive a punishment. If it lived partly justly and partly unjustly, but it was treatable, it would be punished temporarily and after completing the appropriate penance would be rewarded according to its life.[40] Plato clearly states that punishment for the curable has a purely medicinal character.[41] Here is seen the amazing resemblance to the role of suffering in the Catholic doctrine of purification and purgatory, adopted solemnly and after long discussions on July 6, 1439 at the sixth session of the Council of Florence,[42] although it also did not alter the earlier Jewish concept.[43]

About the aim of human life Plato writes; „each man… should assimilate the thinking being to the thought, renewing his original nature, and having assimilated them should attain to that perfect life which the gods have set before mankind, both for the present and the future."[44] The human ideal is achieved through imitation. The schematic of this

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[39] Cf. *Phaedrus* (Fajdros) in the index of citations: Klemens Aleksandryjski, *Kobierce*, tłum. J. Niemirska-Pliszczyńska, Warszawa 1994, t. 2, p. 443.

[40] Cf. Plato, *Gorgias,* 523d–524b.

[41] Cf. Plato, *Gorgias*, 525b; *Phaedo* 113c–114c).

[42] Cf. Council of Florence *Laetentur caeli* 14 (DSP 3, 470–473 with note 33).

[43] Cf. Benedict XVI, Enc. *Spe salvi* 45.

[44] Plato, *Timaeus* 90 D: ὁμοιώσαντα δὲ τέλος ἔχειν τοῦ προτεθέντος ἀνθρώποις ὑπὸ θεῶν ἀρίστου βίου πρός τε τὸν παρόντα καὶ τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον... trans. by Benjamin Jowett.

can be presented in four points. First, „like is dear to like"[45] and should keep the right measure. Second, God is the measure of everything and not man. Third, man can imitate and become like God as much as he is able on his own power. And fourth, a good man who has contact with God serves the good and a man who is bad serves the bad.[46] If God is the measure of all it is only the religious man who can be good. Atheists found it difficult to find a place for themselves in the ancient world.

b) The Classes of Men and the Possibility of Conversion

The matter of a good or evil life is the most essential matter for man.[47] Plato states: „there are three classes of men – lovers of wisdom, lovers of honour, lovers of gain."[48] He continues on to say this, „if you examine the three classes of men, and ask of them in turn which of their lives is pleasantest, each will be found praising his own and depreciating that of others: the money-maker will contrast the vanity of honour or of learning if they bring no money with the solid advantages of gold and silver?"[49] Plato recognizes the model life of a man in relation to the absolute (God is the measure of all), and also shows it from the side of man: each of these people believes that their own life is the best and the most fulfilled.

Can man change himself substantially from that which is bad to become that which is good? In *Gorgias* Plato states, „that if one becomes bad in any respect one must be corrected; that this is good in the second place, – next to being just, to become so and to be corrected by paying the penalty."[50] Plato speaks of the three parts of the process

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[45]   Plato, *Laws* 716a and „the similar recognizes the similar" in – A. Baron, *Neoplatońska idea Boga*, Kraków 2005, p. 262–263.

[46]   Plato, *Laws* 716a–717a.

[47]   Plato, *The Republic* 578c: περὶ γάρ τοι τοῦ μεγίστου ἡ σκέψις, ἀγαθοῦ τε βίου καὶ κακοῦ.

[48]   Plato, *The Republic* 581c: Διὰ ταῦτα δὴ καὶ ἀνθρώπων λέγομεν τὰ πρῶτα τριττὰ γένη εἶναι, φιλόσοφον, φιλόνικον, φιλοκερδές; trans. by Benjamin Jowett.

[49]   Plato, *The Republic* 581 c&d: Οἶσθ' οὖν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ὅτι εἰ 'θέλοις τρεῖς τοιούτους ἀνθρώπους ἐν μέρει ἕκαστον ἀνερωτᾶν τίς τούτων τῶν βίων ἥδιστος, τὸν ἑαυτοῦ ἕκαστος μάλιστα ἐγκωμιάσεται; ὅ τε χρηματιστικὸς πρὸς τὸ κερδαίνειν τὴν τοῦ τιμᾶσθαι ἡδονὴν ἢ τὴν τοῦ μανθάνειν οὐδενὸς ἀξίαν φήσει εἶναι, εἰ μὴ εἴ τι αὐτῶν ἀργύριον ποιεῖ; trans. by Benjamin Jowett.

[50]   Plato, Gorgias. 527b&c: ἐὰν δέ τις κατά τι κακὸς γίγνηται, κολαστέος ἐστί, καὶ τοῦτο δεύτερον ἀγαθὸν μετὰ τὸ εἶναι δίκαιον, τὸ γίγνεσθαι καὶ κολαζόμενον

of the transformation of man: to bear the penalty for committing evil; again become just and pay the penalty. This brings attention to the words κολάζω and δίκη, which in my opinion influenced the subsequent understanding of the biblical word *metanoia* (conversion of mind and heart) in the Greek world as the practice of penance and in the Latin translation expressed in the term *paenitentia*.[51]

c) Human Imitation of God

Plato recognizes the imitation of God by man in the ethical maxim: man should try to become like God as much as he is able under his own power (*Phaedrus* 252d: εἰς τὸ δυνατὸν.)[52] In *Theaetetus* Plato states the following: „Evils… can never pass away; for there must always remain something which is antagonistic to good. Having no place among the gods in heaven, of necessity they hover around the mortal nature, and this earthly sphere. Wherefore we ought to fly away from earth to heaven as quickly as we can; and to fly away is to become like God, as far as this is possible; and to become like him, is to become holy, just, and wise."[53]

The expression δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον during Plato's time defined people who acted justly toward citizens and respectably towards the deities.[54] When reading Plato in regards to the model life of a man, it must be kept in mind that he was writing not only from the perspective of the

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διδόναι δίκην. English trans. *Plato. Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 3* translated by W.R.M. Lamb. Cambridge, ma, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1967.

[51] Cf. i.e. ps. Theodore the Studite: *Kanony o spowiedzi*, 2–28 in: Synody i kolekcje praw, Kraków 2011, t. 5, 487–492; Tertulian, *Adversus Marcionem* 2, 24, in: ccl 1, 501 and sch 368, Paris 1991, p. 140–142. Tertulian explains the difference between pagan penance and Christian penance in (among others): *De paenitentia* 1, 1 (ccl 1, 321; psp 5, p. 174).

[52] Cf. Plato, *The Republic*. 613 a & b: οὐ γὰρ δὴ ὑπό γε θεῶν ποτε ἀμελεῖται ὃς ἂν προθυμεῖσθαι ἐθέλῃ δίκαιος γίγνεσθαι καὶ ἐπιτηδεύων ἀρετὴν εἰς ὅσον δυνατὸν ἀνθρώπῳ ὁμοιοῦσθαι θεῷ.

[53] Plato, *Theaetetus* 176a & b: Ἀλλ᾽ οὔτ᾽ ἀπολέσθαι τὰ κακὰ δυνατόν, ὦ Θεόδωρε – ὑπεναντίον γάρ τι τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἀεὶ εἶναι ἀνάγκη – οὔτ᾽ ἐν θεοῖς αὐτὰ ἱδρῦσθαι, τὴν δὲ θνητὴν φύσιν καὶ τόνδε τὸν τόπον περιπολεῖ ἐξ ἀνάγκης. διὸ καὶ πειρᾶσθαι χρὴ ἐνθένδε ἐκεῖσε φεύγειν ὅτι τάχιστα. φυγὴ δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν· ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι, trans. by Benjamin Jowett.

[54] Cf. D. Wyrwa, *Die christliche Platonaneignung in den Stromateis des Clemens von Alexandrien*, Berlin-New York 1983, p. 178–179.

human person but as a citizen of the Greek *polis*, which is the environment in which he lived. In fact he was writing about the ideal citizen and not the ideal person. This expression is found in *The Republic*,[55] but not only there. The interpretation of the words that speak about escape from the world is important to the text. It seems that Plato understood the ideal person and his perfection in purely spiritual and ethical terms.

Other than those fragments mentioned above, Plato does not return to the ideal in the imitation of God, but reception of this belief appears to have made an impression. The Middle Platonists, such as Philo of Alexandria, Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, write about this.[56] Prof. Maria Dzielska considers that ὁμοίωσις θεῷ forms „the most important postulate of Hellenist philosophy and *paideia.*"[57] Clement of Alexandria connects the Platonic idea of the imitation of God with the biblical truth about the creation of man in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1: 26) and concludes that the return of the „image" of Gen 1:26 some Christians have the understanding that man receives the „image" at the moment of his birth and that the „likeness" is achieved as a result of perfecting himself (*The Stromata* II, 22, 131, 2–6).[58] This begs the question of whether we are like God now (as we read in Gen 1:26) or not until we reach similarity according to the above mentioned opinion of Plato's dialogues? To maintain both, Origen states that man received the image of God in the beginning in conjunction with the first act of creation, and he should develop the similarity himself.[59] Gregory of Nyssa, like Origen, distinguishes between the primary and secondary likeness, stating that first man receives it in the act of creation by God, and second due to the imitation of God during his earthly life.[60]

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[55]   Cf. *The Republic*. 456–461.

[56]   For more on this topic see: Cf. H. Merki, Ὁμοίωσις θεῷ. *Von der platonischen Angleichung an Gott zur Gottähnlichkeit bei Gregor von Nyssa*, Freiburg 1952; M. Osmański, *Filona z Aleksandrii etyka upodabniania się do Boga*, Lublin 2007, p. 28ff. Immitation of God in the thinking of Clement of Alexandria, -Cf. A. Baron, *Świętość a ideały człowieka*, Kraków 2013, p. 245–254.

[57]   Introduction to: *Proklos, Elementy teologii*, Warszawa 2002, p. 24.

[58]   Cf. A. Baron, *Świętość a ideały człowieka*, Kraków 2013, p. 251.

[59]   Cf. Origen, *On First Principles* III, 6, 1 (sch 268, p. 236); cf. A. Baron, *Świętość a ideały człowieka*, Kraków 2013, p. 297–298.

[60]   Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Beatitudes* I (ŹMT 34, p. 33–34; PG 44, k. 1197 v. 26–33); cf. A. Baron, *Neoplatońska idea Boga…*, Kraków 2005, p. 68.

d) Spiritual Values According to Plato and Jesus

It was easy for Christianity to assimilate Plato's ideas since he taught the idea of the immortality of the human soul. It was not about the value of scientific proof, because the philosopher cannot possibly verify any of his generalized assertions, but the compatibility, at least in part, to the Christian teaching about eternal life. However, the immortality of the soul in conjunction with the mortality of the body affect the ideal of man by emphasizing greater concern for the soul rather than the body. This concept collided in relation to Jesus and the last judgment in Matthew 25:33 ff. „For I was hungry and you gave me no food," etc. The words of Jesus can be interpreted in a spiritual sense. The Savior had in mind not only physical hunger but above all spiritual. Church history shows that sometimes Christians in this regard are willing to go along the line indicated by Plato, not Jesus, because it is easier to take care of people in terms of the „spiritual", or at least it is easier to talk about spiritual care than to actually care for our neighbor and his bodily needs. This kind of deformation of the Christian ideal of life, one that grows on hypocrisy opposed the writings of John, were already in existence during the time the New Testament was written (cf. 1 Iohn 3: 17).

By emphasizing the primacy of spiritual values Plato came to believe that the body is the prison of the soul as well as its grave. In general this happened after the foundation of Platonic thinking. No wonder the ideal of becoming like god merged with an escape from the world, and physical death.[61] G. Reale writes that, „for Greek dogma resurrection of the soul was from the body, and it is the exact opposite of the resurrection of the body."[62] Platonic anthropology based on the absolute primacy of the spirit over the flesh prevailed in European thought until the twentieth century.

Conclusion

The Greek world has left behind, both in terms of the material and the spiritual, an enormous legacy of thought. The great philosophical

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[61] Cf. *Phaedo* 67d–68a: man should live close to death, and death here is referred to as physical; *Phaedo* 80d; *Cratylus* 400c.

[62] *Historia filozofii starożytnej*, Lublin 2002, t. v, „psyche" p. 205–206.

schools proposed many examples of the ideals of life and the aspirations of man, which to this day live and enhance the way of life and culture of European people. Their vestiges are visible not only in the social system called democracy, but also in the dimension of the individual and his way of thinking and seeing the world.

It is sufficient to mention Greek architecture, painting, and sculpture and their invaluable impact on the culture of Europe in modern times, as well as, Spartan patriotism and its various positive and negative forms present for example in the ideals of a medieval knight and later in chauvinistic Nazism and Communism, especially in the twentieth century. The same can be said about the cult of work based on Hesiod's ideas and the cult of knowledge and learning coming from the Pythagoreans. In stating this, I do not mean to say that I agree or disagree with these ideals. For example, democracy can very easily turn into corruption and monarchy without a constitution into totalitarianism but this is a different problem.

The *classical period*, from the middle of the fifth century to the beginning of Macedonian hegemony over the Greek polis, saw the work of Pericles, who expanded Athens, and Phidias (Parthenon). Above all this was a time of the great thinker Plato who was the creator of the great school of philosophical thought.

Plato expressed a new way of life. He was interested in the transcendent world of ideas and the Absolute as identified with the good. His system was based on the primacy of the spirit and its call to become one with the gods (imitate God). It was an attempt to change the thinking expressed by the previous Greek words „imitate nature," which later became the basic Stoic model of life. European history shows how the real life of people was placed between these two models: first pre-platonic model later assimilated by the Stoics and second Plato's.

Using the words ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν (likeness to God as far as possible in ethical and not an onthological sense) Plato expressed human limitations and highlighted the strength, power, and ability of a person to do something, including to control one's own desires and passions. This did not play a leading role in Platonic thought until the Middle Platonists gave it the intellectual (noetic) sense. Later, Christian writers (notably Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Gregory of Nyssa) would assimilate it into Christian thought and promote it as an ideal for human life.

Plato emphasized the role of virtue in self-realization (mastering desires) and the virtue of justice. It is not surprising that in the Christianity of the Greco-Roman world the discussion on the relation between God's justice and mercy continue to this day. It is enlivened by the fact that the importance of justice is stressed not only in the Greek world, but also in Judaism.

Plato recognizes man's ideal in terms of the ethical. For him, it is important to master oneself and strive for one's own good and perfection. The Good is its own virtue. In order to achieve the good man needs to do good works and not receive them because offering the good of self to others is one's own good and happiness.

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