

## SUMMARY

### MEGALOPSYCHOCRACY

#### ON VIRTUE IN POLITICS AND POLICY OF VIRTUE (FROM HOMER TO ARENDT AND STRAUSS)

According to Aristotle, a human being of "magnificent soul" (*megalopsychos*) is an ethically excellent creature, who having attained ethical excellence may consider himself worthy of greatness and who, indeed, deserves it. Megalopsychocracy referred to in the title of this work would constitute a system - ignored by Aristotle, who valued aristocracy most highly - where the virtue of *magalopsyche* would constitute the "principle" (doing justice to Montesquieu's terminology), while the type of human being embodying it would be an authoritative type (i.e. whose example would then be universally emulated). In megalopsychocracy ethical excellence and greatness of an individual would be the reason for and the ultimate goal of existence of a society. According to the proposed view, subordinating a society to eminent individuals would entail the existence of hierarchy oriented towards a certain ideal of humanness, where personal excellence would be the ultimate to aspire to. If a community adopted this ideal as universal guidelines for thinking and actions of its members, creating conditions for emergence and development of eminent individuals would naturally become identified as the community's common good.

When referring to the "principle" of a given system, Montesquieu meant the passions which exert the strongest impact on everyone - the rulers and the ruled - living within it. Multitude of principles predominating in various systems entails the existence of multitude of "predominating" human types; therefore "principles" may be defined as essential elements of human self-awareness. If we discuss various types of hierarchies of passion, which according to Montesquieu characterise various social organisms, it seems that the issue of hierarchy may be also perceived in relation to human beings who constitute these organisms. If on the basis of the criterion mentioned above various types of societies are distinguished, does it not empower us to distinguish various types of human beings? Is the man pursuing the political virtue the same as the man whose thinking and actions are subjugated to the requirements of honour? The classification of systems according to the principles "moving" them proposed by Montesquieu may thus constitute a point of reference for the notion of authority (*kratos*) proposed in this work as the domination of a type of human being predominating in a given system. In this view magalopsychocracy should be defined as the system based on "passions" of a human being of magnificent soul.

However, the problem consists in the fact that this type of human being, as unanimously testified by Aristotle and Nietzsche, among others, has never become universal enough to constitute the "principle" of any of the existing systems. Thus, megalopsychocracy must be defined in a normative manner: as a system predominated by a *desired* - and not necessarily actually existing - type of human being. This approach seems obvious in relation to any Utopian project, which on principle is a critical analysis of the current state of affairs,

aiming at presenting the possibility of converting or transgressing it: transforming it from what is to what it should be.

However, here another obstacle is encountered. The type of human being whose "passions" could define the "principle" of megalopsychocracy has never been universally desired. Thus, none of realistic descriptions of the existing types of human being defines the specific character of the existence of *megalopsychos* - neither is it explained by any of the hitherto predominating ideals or models of humanness. So far the "human being of magnificent soul" has always been an exception: as someone who in his thinking and actions opposed common interpretation of what each of us is as well as may and should be. His self-awareness, unique values and hierarchy of goals were formed in critical opposition to what was considered valuable and desirable in a human being.

Before the discussion of megalopsychocracy commences, I am trying to define the types of human being which theory and practice have hitherto considered desirable. If we want to present the conditions enabling a human being of magnificent soul to acquire political significance, we obviously cannot ignore the sphere of values and ideals. However insufficient, yet essential, prerequisite for acquiring any virtue -including the virtue of magnanimity - is a desire to form one's existence after the model of humanness embodied by this very virtue and which we may accept as especially valuable. Thus this primary decision concerned with the sphere of values, determines the possibility of emergence of a certain type of human being. This, however, denotes that every *new* type emerges from the confrontation leading to negation or transgression of "competing" models of humanness, primarily these which have become predominating there and then.

Plato, the inventor of political philosophy, never separates the discussion of ethics and politics and presents the dependence of the latter on the type of human being which is considered desirable. Although it is true that Plato's vision of the state, tightly connected with his metaphysics, is in its assumption an ideal project of political and moral revival of humanness, it also reflects real self-interpretation of culture which it comes from. The culture in which the objective of raising a righteous human being - a superior human being - is identical with raising a righteous citizen. Plato's philosophy is one of the theoretical justifications of a conviction deeply ingrained in Greeks that excellence is the duty and the "objective" of a human being (the fact that we are humans obliges us to attain a certain state of existence) and that attaining this existential objective requires the existence of a well-organised *polis*.

Medieval political thought remains within the sphere of the same basic assumptions, yet it significantly transforms the notion of human excellence. It is now perceived primarily in the context of the religious and moral imperative of salvation. Due to this transformation, among others, the dependence of political thought on what we called the predominating desired type of human being may become almost perfectly unambiguous. The imperative became one of the most important and the most universal elements of self-interpretation of the contemporary human being. Even though a man probably never became who in his own

conviction he should be, the fact remains that the "ideal" sphere of obligation influenced his manner of understanding and forming his own "real" existence. Therefore, each attempt to characterise this human being, just like any other, must fail if the desired model of humanness is not taken into consideration.

Fathers of modern political philosophy aimed at providing theoretical framework for a secular state, free from Christian imperative of salvation. Political neutralisation of the imperative became possible due to the adoption of the principle fundamental for modern political thought, consisting in the fact that a human being should be perceived as he is and not as he should be. The principle turned against the whole hitherto existing tradition of political thought - both Christian and ancient - as it aimed at ultimate separation of politics from ethical or religious and ethical issue (duty) of human excellence. It might thus seem that in the case of modern political thought any attempt to refer to the (predominating) *desired* type of human being has no sense any longer. Its representatives supported the view that political institutions are not and should not be obliged (or privileged) to support citizens in implementing any specific model of humanness, which leads to the conclusion that a discussion of politics does not have to and should not take such a model into consideration.

However, according to what was said above, ignoring this aspect of self-interpretation of a human being prevents his accurate description. For this reason the modern view of politics (and foremostly of a "political human being") might seem one-sided and thus distorted. In this work I aim at proving that the proponents of this view hardly ever remained consistent with their own assumptions, that in their attempts to provide a description of a human being as he is they continually - and as it were against their own will - referred to a certain model of humanness which in their times was increasingly becoming desirable.

The comparison of the classical model of a desired type of human being and the modern model facilitates the justification of the thesis outlined above. It is also essential for the discussion of megalopsychocracy, which is presented as a (Utopian) alternative to politics whose theoretical and practical principles began to be formulated in the early modernity, the politics which reflects and is formed by a certain type of human being. References to the classical model - which also remains a certain alternative - may help, through comparison, to characterise and evaluate both the type and the "justly proud" human being, whose virtue is to constitute the "principle" of megalopsychocracy.

Exquisite description of the type may be found in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he expresses open admiration for this type of human being. However, he remarks that the type's personal excellence renders him problematic or even dangerous for the political community. At least for this reason a "magnanimous man" cannot and should not become a predominating (desired) type of human being. What is more, by stating that the proper objective of politics is common good and not personal gain of individuals or social groups, Aristotle seems to exclude the very idea of megalopsychocracy, according to which

the function of and the criterion for evaluating any given community is "raising" eminent individuals.

Aristotelian description constitutes a point of departure for proving the difference between this model of human life and the predominating types of human beings outlined above. However, Aristotle's firm statement that a "magnanimous man's" most important characteristic is "ethical courage" emphasises the need to differentiate within the very criterion of the hitherto existing division. If *megalopsychos* interprets its own existence in terms of virtue (aiming at excellence), it seems that it should be attributed to the "classical" model. However, I aim at proving that its specific manner of understanding and practising virtue differs decisively from classical (ancient and medieval) models of righteous life formulated within political thought.

Aristotle himself partially explains the difference when as characters who in his opinion deserved the name of *megalopsychos* he names Homeric heroes embodying the ideals of traditional Hellenic nobility, formed in metaphysical, ethical and political contexts differing from those which became the basis for (whichever version) of classical philosophy of politics. What is more, their motivations and actions described in *Iliad* prove that in a certain manner they also transgressed the model of righteous life and behaviour predominating at that time - at least among the aristocracy. Aristotle, similarly as Plato before him, aims at adjusting the model, by transforming it, to the requirements of the ethic concept which resulted from a different interpretation of human nature and redefined the place of a human being in the universe and society. However, it transpires that *megalopsychos* transgresses also this pattern.

In view of the *Christian* vision of virtuous (righteous) life the problematic character of *megalopsychos* becomes distinctly more apparent. Many of the essential features of its character, which Plato and Aristotle considered admirable and concurrent with their own models of humanness (however, after appropriate redirecting them and transforming the remaining features), Christian thought considers contradictory to a real virtue. It thus transpires that even though the "magnanimous" type of human being, similarly as the "classical" type, accepts the obligation of improving his existence, the manner of understanding and evaluating excellence considerably differs from what may be found in classical views on virtue and the consequent concepts of politics.

It undoubtedly differs even more from what is to be found in the concepts by modern authors. From the point of view of definitions concerned with human nature which they include not only its own understanding of virtue but also the very understanding of virtue as a natural obligation should be considered erroneous.

It thus seems that scarceness of a "magnanimous" man largely results from the fact that he implements values and ideals differing from universally professed ones. Because these values and ideals are tightly related to the manner in which we understand human nature, the reasons for inability to promulgate *megalopsychos* should be perceived in the fact that properties, possibilities and obligations of human existence which it propagates

have been ignored or even negated within the realm of predominating views on who a human being is and who he can and should be.

If megalopsychocracy is related to the modern model of politics, its Utopian character must seem much greater than that of the classical model. What political significance could proud excellence based on virtue have in the society of equal individuals who have congregated solely for the purpose of self-preservation and improvement of material conditions of their existence? If, however, we wanted to find a place for virtue in the modern system - which is one of the recurrent motifs both among the opponents and the proponents - *megalopsychocracy*, as I am trying to prove, may transpire to be considerably less Utopian than any classical proposals. The virtue of *megalopsychos* is free from those metaphysical assumptions which constituted the grounds for the classical concept of virtue and which seem to have irretrievably lost their credibility. Identifying what is human in man with what is (potentially or really) most excellent, *megalopsychos* decisively excludes the possibility of defining its own existence according to what is the lowest in it; it also decisively rejects the possibility that it could be defined according to what transgresses and exceeds human existence. Although excellence is, similarly as for classical authors, the greatest human obligation, it remains a purely human obligation which does not lend itself to any external evaluation, as it is a measure for its own sake.

My reflections on *megalopsychocracy* are tightly connected with the examination of the possibility of restoring dignity in the world where it lost its meaning and significance. An attempt at defining the conditions in which *megalopsychos* could become the predominating type of a human being is, at the same time, one of the possible attempts to find an answer to the question whether human excellence may become the object of aspiration for those who having lost faith in what is superhuman, equalled the subhuman with the human, thus making it the only object worthy of desire.