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**„IMMIGRATION POLICY”
ACCORDING TO PLATO**

**„POLITYKA MIGRACYJNA”
WEDŁUG PLATONA**

ABSTRACT

The issue of immigrants' place in Western societies is still vital, and it is considered from various theoretical and axiological positions. The article attempts to look at these issues through the eyes of a classic of European philosophy, which is Plato. In ancient Greece, foreigners were approached rather with superiority; Greeks believed that the world is divided into them and barbarians. The same is true of Plato, who proposes many rules for treating „aliens” in his theory of the ideal state. These principles are based on the assumption that citizens and noncitizens (foreigners and slaves) cannot be treated equally in every respect.

Key words: Plato, immigration, inequality, foreigners, theory of state

ABSTRAKT

Problematyka miejsca imigrantów w społeczeństwach Zachodu jest wciąż żywa, a w jej obrębie występują różne stanowiska teoretyczne i aksjologiczne. Artykuł stano-

wi próbę spojrzenia na to zagadnienie oczami klasyka filozofii europejskiej, którym jest Platon. W starożytnej Grecji podchodzono do cudzoziemców raczej z poczuciem wyższości; w przekonaniu, że świat dzieli się na Greków i barbarzyńców. Podobnie jest u Platona, który w swojej teorii idealnego państwa proponuje szereg zasad traktowania osób nieposiadających praw obywatelskich. Zasady te opierają się na założeniu, że obywatele i nie-obywatele (cudzoziemcy i niewolnicy) nie mogą być pod każdym względem traktowani równo.

Słowa kluczowe: Platon, imigracja, nierówność, cudzoziemcy, teoria państwa

INTRODUCTION

The issue of the multiplicity of cultures and the resulting problems and dilemmas, especially in the context of the present day's migration problems, is one of the most severe issues facing not only Europe but the whole so-called Western world. Therefore, theoretical attempts to find solutions to this challenging problem, and even attempts to diagnose it themselves, are valuable. Such attempts, made from different perspectives, allow for a more complete and multilateral insight into the existing state of affairs, its evaluation from different points of view (including the points of view that are different in terms of axiology), foster critical analysis of the arguments raised by the parties to the dispute, and may also constitute a starting point for reflection on measures allowing for levelling or at least alleviating the persisting problems. The issue of civilizational divisions, the world's perception as being made up of „theirs” and „aliens” was present in ancient Greece. As Norman Davies writes, Free Hellada was considered by its inhabitants to be the „Land of Freedom”, the „Wonderful West”, the „Fatherland of Beauty and Wisdom”. At the same time, the East (Persia) was for them the seat of slavery, brutality, and ignorance. As this researcher notes, „The conviction that Greece was freedom itself and Persia was tyranny itself was extremely subjective. However, it was the basis of the

tradition that «civilization» was stubbornly linked to «Europe» and «the West» [Davies, 2010, p. 134]. In the fifth century BC. Greece, Davies points out, became more self-satisfied and xenophobic than before. The most effective advocates of transformation were the authors of Greek tragedies, especially Aeschylus. He created a stereotype of this nation describing its representatives as barbarians – servants, arrogant, cruel, effeminate, and dissolute (especially in the play *Persians*). „Since then, all non-Greeks were to be endowed with this epithet. No one could match the wise, courageous, righteous, and freedom-loving Greeks. [...]. By Plato’s time, an enduring barrier had already grown between the Greeks and all foreigners” [Davies, 2010, p. 135]. As Davies writes, some believe that the treatment of neighboring peoples by the Greeks became a European tradition in the wrong sense of the word. As it turns out, Plato’s views on „strangers” in a well-organized state mostly fit into the Greek stereotype outlined above¹.

It is essential that Plato’s view of the ideal state has evolved, or rather – to be more precise – Plato has come to skeptical conclusions about the possibility of realizing the full ideal of the state in human conditions. As a result, we are dealing with two concepts of state in Plato. The first one he expresses in the dialogue the *Republic* (gr. Πολιτεία, *Politeia*), it is radical, among other things because its author assumes that the citizens belonging to the two upper layers of society (guards and ruling philosophers) will not be able to have private property or their own families, and biological parents will not know their children and vice versa. Plato assumed here that having property and a family threatens to turn the citizens, on whom the state’s fate depends, towards what is own while neglecting what is

¹ One example of different treating Greeks and „aliens” is Plato’s statement on the war. When the Greeks fight with each other, Plato says, this should be called sickness and internal disintegration, not war. War, on the other hand, occurs when the Greeks are fighting the barbarians, which are enemies by nature to them (Platon, 1999, 470 C-D).

common and what serves the state as a whole best². On the other hand, for the lower classes of society – farmers and craftsmen – there is no explicit ban on owning property. However, this lower class has a servant role, does not participate in the governance of the state, and must fully obey the rulers. The *Laws* (gr. *Nómoi, Nómoi*), which are the late, perhaps last, work of Plato, present a less radical concept of the state³. The previous ideal of a perfect state, called here „the first state”, remains valid, but as Plato states, the state described in *Politea* can function among the gods, but not among people, where only „the second state” can function. This „second state” is - like „the first state” – the unity, but second row [Platon, 1960, 739 A-E]. In the *Laws* Plato describes in great detail the legal order of „the second state”, also talking about the way the state authorities and society treat strangers.

GENERAL RULES ON THE ADMISSION OF FOREIGN NATIONALS

Although Plato’s concept seems unacceptable to many by today’s standards, it is worth stressing at the beginning that the author of the

² This is what Aristotle criticizes him for, as he recognizes the importance of the unity of the state and notes that such unity is impossible without the mutual, personal bonds of citizens. He writes in *Politics*: „There are two things that primarily arouse people’s feelings of care and love: personal ownership and a beloved being; yet in a state with such a system there can be no place for either one or the other” (Aristoteles, 2001, 1262b).

³ The *Laws* is the longest dialogue; it is one-fifth of all Plato’s works, it is unanimously accepted that it is late, if not the last. It is worth noting that the members of Plato’s Academy advised politicians on legislation, among others, for newly established colonies. Based on the fact that the Academy performed advisory and legislative functions, some people assume that Plato’s *Laws* are a collection of technical instructions. They were not only a pure theory but were a starting point for reforming existing laws or creating new ones in emerging colonies (Zygmuntowicz, 2011, p. 9, 11, 19–21).

Laws emphasizes the need to take care of foreigners. As he argues, guilt committed against foreigners attracts more divine revenge than guilt committed against fellow citizens. A foreigner arouses more pity than a native among people and gods because he or she is far from his relatives and friends. Obligations to foreigners must, therefore, be considered sacred [Platon, 1960, 729 E]. There should always be room in the state for a foreigner who wishes to settle in it – provided that he has knowledge of certain crafts and will stay in the country for no longer than 20 years from the date of his inclusion in the list of settlers. He will not have to pay a fee for the right of residence or pay taxes when dealing with a sale or purchase – it is enough that he behaves handsomely. When his stay is over, he will take everything he has and leave the country. However, if, during his stay, he does the state a significant favor, he can ask the relevant authorities (the Council and the People’s Assembly) to postpone the date of leaving the country or to allow him to stay there for the rest of his life. For the sons of settlers over 15 years old and engaged in some craft, the settling period will start from 15. They will be allowed to stay in the country for 20 years, but if one wants to stay longer or for life, he will have to apply for permission, as described above. Also, the liberated slave may stay in the country for no longer than twenty years. After this time, he must take his property and leave the country like other foreigners – unless he receives permission from the authorities and his former master to stay [Platon, 1960, 850 A-C, 915 A-B].

Plato also talks about foreigners staying in the state for a short time. There are four types of them. The first one is regular visitors, who usually come in the summer for trade and income. Designated officials will take care of their placement in state buildings near the city, but outside it. They will try to contact them as little as possible, but at the same time treat them fairly and make sure that none of them introduce any innovations. The second group includes those who come as spectators and listeners of art shows and performances. For them, taverns will be prepared near

the temples, where they will find the most pleasant reception, and priests and servants in the temples will look after them with care. After a short stay and seeing and hearing what they wanted, they will leave the country without harming anyone and without being hurt themselves.

A foreigner in the third category is the one whom another country has sent on an official mission. Only strategists and military commanders will be able to take him, and the one who will host him in his home will take care of providing him with everything he needs. If he arrives at all because he is a rare visitor, the fourth type of visitor will be some kind of researcher that another country sends abroad to observe and study foreign countries and their customs. He must be no less than 50 years old and travel to either see something beautiful, superior to anything he has seen so far or inform another country about it. Such a man may uninvitedly knock on the door of the state's best citizens because he is one of them. So he can, for example, go to the home of the head of youth education and be sure to find a dignified reception with a dignified host or visit those who have achieved victory in virtue. By communing with them, he will learn many things from them, and he will teach them many things. When parting comes, he will say good-bye to them as a friend, and, overflowing with gifts and honors, will leave the country [Platon, 1960, 952E-953D].

Plato also addresses the issue of foreign trips of state citizens. He recognizes that anyone under the age of 40 will under no circumstances be allowed to leave the country, nor will anyone be allowed to go abroad for private reasons. Only citizens who have an official mission to fulfill, for example, as researchers of foreign customs, may travel abroad. Among other things, the state will send eminent citizens, distinguished by nobility and virtue, to celebrations of the gods that will take place abroad. These citizens will make the state famous and glorify it. On their return, they should instruct the young people that foreign countries' customs and facilities are inferior to those of the locals. Selected citizens

should also be sent abroad as observers of foreign customs. As Plato points out, it is impossible to achieve the fullness of civilization and culture without knowing others. By getting to know people both good and bad, citizens will understand the importance of rights, not just stick to them out of habit [Platon, 1960, 951A-B].

THE WAY OF TREATING SETTLERS. INEQUALITY

The laws in the ideal state of Plato are different for citizens, settlers, and slaves. Each of these population groups also performs different tasks: citizens care about virtue, take part in political life, learn war crafts, settlers engage in crafts and trade, and slaves cultivate the land [Platon, 1960, 806 D-E]. As for inequality before the law, in some cases, it is stricter for citizens, in others for settlers and foreigners. For example, a non-citizen who commits sacrilege (by which Plato means stealing objects from the temple) will be punished by burning on his face and his hands the stigmata of his deed, punished by flogging and banished from the country. On the other hand, a citizen committing such an act will be considered „incurable ill” because having received the best education and upbringing since childhood, he could not refrain from the worst of mischief. So the punishment will be death for him, his name will be forgotten, and the corpse will be thrown out of the country. In turn, e.g., for beating an elderly, citizen will be sentenced to at least one year in prison, while a settler will be sentenced to three years and a foreigner – to two [Platon, 1960, 854D-855A, 880B-C].

Plato believes that private people should not possess gold or silver, but money usage is necessary for craftsmen and those who have to pay mercenaries, slaves, or settlers. Therefore, the state must introduce a circulating coin that has value only within the state’s borders. The author of the *Laws* claims that the harvest should be divided into 12 parts

(this is the number of parts into which the state is divided), and each of these parts into three: one for citizens, one for slaves, one for craftsmen and foreigners staying temporarily or permanently in the state. Only the last part may be sold [Platon, 1960, 742A, 847E-848A].

Plato particularly strongly condemns the court proceedings for litigiousness or profit-making reasons and the attempts to drag judges to their side using rhetorical measures to disturb the judges' healthy sense of justice. Those who do so will be judged by the highest tribunal, which will decide whether they are guilty and whether the defendant's motive is litigiousness or money. When this is litigiousness, the court will decide how long the accused will not be allowed to sue or support anyone in the court. If it turns out that the accused did it for money, then when he is a foreigner, he will have to leave the country without the right to return, under penalty of death. If, on the other hand, he is a citizen, he will die because he valued money above all else. The one who has been proven twice to have sued for the litigiousness will also die. Plato also recognizes that citizens cannot swear in court, as this creates an opportunity for perjury. On the other hand, foreigners are allowed to swear in court proceedings because they will not settle down in the country long enough to raise similar offspring that would remain permanently in the country [Platon, 1960, 938A-C, 949C].

Although settlers can use money, their property rights are limited. Plato assumes that citizens should be divided into four property classes. The primary measure is the plot drawn by each citizen when establishing the state. The owner of the plot may enlarge it two, three, or four times at most. Each such enlargement will result in the transition to the next, higher property class. If somebody's assets exceed the prescribed measure, he would have to return the surplus⁴. Otherwise, he will pay the

⁴ Plato believes that the worst disease of the state is an internal breakdown. It occurs when some citizens are excessively poor, and others are excessively rich. So the legislator must set the limit of poverty and wealth (Platon, 1960, 744 D).

penalty in the amount of the surplus and suffer additional consequences (among other things, he will be deprived of his share of public income). Assets accumulated by a foreigner may not be higher than those of a third estate class citizen. If the stranger exceeds this limit, he will have to take all his belongings and leave the country within thirty days. He will also not have the right to apply for an extension of his stay. If he does not comply with this regulation, he will be punished by death, and his assets will be confiscated for the benefit of the state [Platon, 1960, 744E-745A, 915B-C].

According to Plato, besides serious, edifying, holy things, citizens should also learn – through comedy performances – what is low, humorous, funny. It is impossible to know what is serious without knowing what is funny (because you cannot get to know a thing without knowing the opposite of it). Thanks to this knowledge, a citizen will avoid saying or doing what is funny when there is no need to do so. In comedy performances, however, only slaves and paid foreigners should appear, not citizens. Moreover, free people should not learn the jokes that appear in these performances, and to this end, they have to watch some new, unknown comedy every time [Platon, 1960, 816D-E]⁵.

THE REASONS FOR THE DESCRIBED TREATMENT OF FOREIGNERS AND LIMITING TRIPS OF CITIZENS ABROAD

The issue of foreign travel of citizens and hosting foreigners is vital for the state. When citizens of different countries enter into relations with each other, they take over the customs and forms of life from each other, and then they strive to introduce them in their countries. This process is detrimental to the state, which is governed by the best laws.

⁵ Funny things should be known, but, as Plato stresses, they should not be dealt with.

The adoption of foreign customs, on the other hand, is irrelevant for a state that does not have good laws. However, Plato is against the complete closure of the state. As he writes, such conduct would be considered by others as a sign of savagery and deserves to be stigmatized as the so-called „closing of the door in front of the guest”⁶. However, due to the danger of corrupting customs, contacts between citizens and foreigners must be strictly regulated. Therefore, Plato proposes the rules mentioned above.

It is also worth explaining why Plato entrusts the occupation of crafts, trade, paid services to settlers and foreigners, and forbids this to citizens. The author of the *Laws* asks: why are such professions as a merchant or an innkeeper regarded as dishonorable and unsightly? The explanation is as follows: few people can keep moderation, and when they have the opportunity to earn a high income, they do not lose their heads and remain moderate. Most people do the opposite – they do not know moderation in their needs, and when they can earn a modest income, they desire excessive profits. If the best people ran trade or taverns, these occupations would be arousing sympathy and kindness, because they would be done reasonably and would not be distorted. However, these professions are usually performed by people who are not moderate, who want excessive profit. Hence, a negative attitude towards this type of activity is prevailing [Platon, 1960, 918D-919A]. Therefore, in a well-designed country, it is necessary to strive for as few people as possible to trade. Furthermore, this should be done by people whose possible spoiling due to this will not do much harm to the state. Trade and similar activities should, therefore, be carried out by non-nationals who are only temporarily resident in the state and do not have much influence on the local community.

⁶ As Maria Maykowska (the translator of the *Laws*) writes, these words of Plato are an allusion to the custom in Sparta of not allowing foreigners in.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

As can be seen from the contents mentioned above, the position of foreigners and settlers in Plato’s „second state” is lower than that of citizens. The activities envisaged for them are of a servant nature, and the length of their stay is limited, as is the possibility of getting rich. On the other hand, foreigners and settlers enjoy certain privileges – the moral requirements for them are, in some cases, lower than those for citizens, and this results in lenient penalties for certain offenses.

Plato’s ideas concerning the treatment of foreigners may be considered by many inhabitants of the so-called civilized countries as an astonishing, distasteful, or horrifying historical curiosity, which has little to do with the current reality. It seems that we live in a relatively open, globalized and liberalized world, where it is said, among other things, that all people should be equal before the law; where the equality of different cultures and religions is usually recognised and it is often assumed that people should be able to choose where they live and even to choose their home country. From this perspective, the proposals of the author of the *Laws* may seem anachronistic, oppressive, discriminatory⁷. However, some remarks need to be made here. First of all, many of Plato’s ideas from the *Laws* agree with how his contemporaries perceived

⁷ Harsh and detailed criticism of Plato’s social views is carried out by Karl Popper. He considers the author of *Laws* to be an advocate of totalitarianism and an advocate of class privileges. According to Popper, when Plato considers it fair for everyone to do their own thing according to their abilities (which translates into depriving a significant part of a society of its influence on power) Plato understands justice as a principle of class privileges, and not as it is commonly understood – precisely as a lack of privileges [Popper, 2010, p. 136–138]. On the other hand, it is worth quoting Richard Hare’s position. This author indicates that if one considers that in the sphere of values, not everyone is equally competent, it is more difficult to reject Plato’s authoritarian argumentation, which recognizes that those more competent indicate to the less competent what the good life means [Hare, 1996, p. 74].

strangers; with how the division into civilised Greeks and barbaric non-Greeks was widespread at the time; and with how Athenian democracy functioned, excluding from political life foreigners engaged in crafts and hired labour, women, slaves. Compared to some Greek city-states' functioning, some of Plato's proposals are even progressive – for example, the fundamental equalization of women's and men's rights (Plato takes such a position both in the *Republic* and in the *Laws*).

Secondly, Plato takes into consideration an ideal state in which citizens value their souls most. The body is valued lower, and the material goods have the lowest value (in the real world people – it seems – value their bodies most and their souls least). Plato believes that laws and state institutions based on this very hierarchy are the best, so state authorities should prevent them from being spoiled by foreign influences. This argument is worth considering: if it is assumed that contact with external factors (e.g., foreigners, their culture, customs) can influence institutions, the legal system, the culture of a given state (such a thesis seems apt), and at the same time this influence may turn out to be negative (here a difficulty arises as to the criteria of what is negative), then it would indeed be rational to limit such influence (the ways of such limitation are a matter of dispute). Third note: both Plato's theory of the ideal state and the realities of ancient Greece are perhaps not so different from today's social reality in some respects. The justification for this claim is given in answer to the question: who in civilized, developed, economically leading countries nowadays does all kinds of unskilled service jobs, with low social prestige, that the indigenous citizens of these countries do not want to practice? It seems that people who strive for equal treatment of indigenous people and immigrants in these countries still have much work to do.

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