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PLATO VERSUS PLUTOCRACY

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Abstract

In “The Republic” Plato primarily discussed the idea of justice, by exposing correlations between human soul and political order. He relates the realm of private property, market relationships, and profit-oriented mind with the lowest social class, which corresponds to the domain of lust and pleasure in human soul. Higher rated social classes or abilities of soul are only responsible for the well-being of society and for the establishment of harmony in human soul. In “Laws” he developed an idea of a permanent training against the domination of excessive pleasure, as the basic condition for setting up a society in accordance with human nature.

The neoliberal concept of economic order not only questions, but silently denies such or similar perceptions of humanity. Emphasizing market as a regulator of all social relationships and human values, it presumes the highest value of greedy accumulation of money, power, or material possessions. Simultaneously, it implies plutocracy as an ideal of social order.

In this paper we intend to discuss that contrast, including the opposition of Keynesianism and Friedmanism in modern economics.

Keywords: human nature, social order, neoliberalism

1. INTRODUCTION

In his recently published book entitled *Keynes: The Return of the Master*, Robert Skidelsky mentioned Plato or Platonism exactly seven times. Each time these names intended to connote an idealized, non-realistic theory or inclination. He used them in accordance with the ordinary way of presenting Plato's philosophy in educational institutions and overviews of so-called "great philosophers" worldwide.

On the other hand, dictionaries define "plutocracy" as "a country which is ruled by its wealthiest people, or a class of wealthy people who rule a country". (Sinclair, 1998, p.1267) Hence, one is most likely to interpret the title of this paper as an opposition between idealistic attitude and ruling of the rich. Does it make sense? Hardly.

But, perhaps, we should not take these usual meanings too literally. For, if one takes a look over the books written about Plato in last 30-40 years – e.g. only by Croatian authors – one would realize that the label mentioned above is an oversimplified misinterpretation of something that could be called "Plato's philosophy". Namely, his thoughts – particularly in his late age – approach human nature in order to deal seriously with its most tricky features, contrary to any sort of unrealistic idealization. Even his "theory of ideas" has nothing to do with idealization. Anyhow, wouldn't it be surprising that pure drive to see things better than they are has caused such a glory and authority over two and half millenniums?

In this paper Plato is not a personification of some attitude or inclination, but the representative of *his own thoughts* related to the topic co-determined by the term "plutocracy" – derived from the ancient Greek *plouto-kratia*: oligarchy of wealth (Liddell-Scott, 1976, p.1432). It's well known that throughout the human history small groups of rich people were ruling from time to time, in different types of social orders – slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism. But, in this occasion we are not interested in the rule of the rich in its historical manifestations. We rather intend to focus on plutocracy as an expression of a certain *cultural tendency*, as the rule of "the idea of wealth" or wealth itself. Or, to put it in the contemporary context – as Skidelsky (2009, p.133) interpreted one Alastair Darling's statement – "he seemed to be saying that the fault lay in a money-obsessed culture – one in which money had become the measure of all things". In other words (Ferguson, 2008), the planet Money increasingly overshadows the planet Earth. The ascent of man as a thinker, which took place in last four millenniums, has been replaced by the ascent of man as a banker.

Pascal Bruckner explained the possibility of domination of such a plutocratic drive or passion claiming that money is

"a miraculous consolation. As long as we make efforts to earn, save or spend it, it absorbs all energy, it is self-sufficient, it makes life perfectly meaningful. It's imbued with strong forces, too strong to tolerate any competition. As it is well known to the Church, it's the only rival to the God, equally able to embrace the manifold of the

world in its unity, to limit its expansion. To tell the truth, it is the only absolute accepted in the age of relativism.” (Bruckner, 2004, p.31)

Culture obsessed with *wealth or money* as a universal measure or the new absolute *versus* Plato’s or genuine Platonic ideas about the culture based on taking into account the wholeness of *human nature* – that is exactly the topic of this paper.

2. ECONOMY, ECONOMICS, AND ECONOMISM

Would it be surprising if one raise an objection that there is no *versus*, i.e. no opposition between obsession with money and human nature? For, more than three centuries ago western societies started being dominated by people like John Law, obsessed with making money, with the world market, banks, investments, stocks and stock-exchange, insurance, etc. – and nowadays such a tendency is booming. Therefore, it’s getting harder to disagree with Karl Marx’s statement, that economic relationships determine all other aspects of life. One might conclude that we are predetermined by nature to strive for wealth more than for anything else, that we are first and foremost interminably accumulating, i.e. plutocratic beings.

However, should millenniums when it was not the case be overlooked, epochs when people were occupied with some other ideas or values – religious, military, ethical, aesthetic? Times when economics as a science did not exist, when economy was considered as a pure means of survival (*oikonomia*: management of a household or family) (Liddell-Scott, 1976, p.1204), and wealth as a desirable support, not as a final goal? Recent publicly widely discussed expectations from economics suggest that such epochs slipped one’s attention.

„Today, wealth increase is the only goal western society has to offer. The previous great competing objects of striving – military glory and eternal bliss – are radically out of favor.” (Skidelsky, 2009, p.134)

It seems to be taken for granted among general people that the same human activity which allegedly caused the global crisis, together with the accompanying science, can solve it. Not only media, but almost all social institutions elevate the *economic* standpoint as the most relevant, unavoidable in discussing any problem in this world. In Bruckner’s words:

“Capitalism obviously desecrated everything: customs, habits, beliefs – except capitalism itself, which avoided skepticism towards great conceptions of the world. The triumph of economism, namely the elevation of a single discipline into absolute science, the mother of all sciences, that aspires, like in Marx’s example, to rule social, political, and intimate life, and, starting from its own postulates, to restructure the whole universe.” (Bruckner, 2004, p.90-91)

The most discussed problem in recent economics is the world market: should it be regulated by state governments or left to itself? The related questions are: How much is the market predictable? Is it able to perform self-regulation? It's evident that the topic is not man, human being as such, but one of social constructions lifted to the metaphysical level. Market is the subject of interest as the most vivid and the most important entity in the world, omnipresent and omnipotent.

Should such an elevation be taken for granted as the only, or perhaps the most progressive, option in the course of history? What are the conditions of possibility for that elevation? Does it assume some specific perception and comprehension of humanity and of human togetherness, strange to all previous historical epochs?

Philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Eugen Fink made it clear that economism was unavoidable in the Modern History, due to domination of the new scientific method and of the idea of unlimited man's freedom (regarding God and nature). Relying on numbers, images, and symbols – as Damir Barbarić (2001, p.13-39) interprets – new sciences have introduced radical relativism into human consciousness, a universal and endless replaceability. On the other hand, starting from the Renaissance, man has perceived himself as the measure of all things, absolutely unrestrained – but in the meantime he has shown incapacity to deal with such a freedom: after becoming saturated, he escaped from it into the passivity of the mass-behavior and simultaneously into the “hectic restlessness of uncontainable work and production”. These controversial, chaotic attitudes and circumstances – “the whirl of infinity” – have caused the reduction of society to the never-ending process of universal trade and exchange, i.e. *market*.

Hence, *plutocracy* is the mental and the social expression of such a historical constellation, and *economism* is the corresponding theoretical reaction. What about economists? Do they take that constellation as a normal, acceptable – maybe even desirable – condition of the mankind?

The well-known fact is that we live under the domination of neoliberal economic theory inaugurated half a century ago by Milton Friedman, in his programmatic work *Capitalism and Freedom*. In that period of time, until early 80s, widely accepted economic worldview was the one represented by John Maynard Keynes. The recent crisis of the world market made him actual again, as the most prominent Friedman's opponent. Is the opposition between two of them a sufficient theoretical background for discussing and maybe even solving the crisis? Is the solution to the market crisis the recovery and stabilization of the market or perhaps repositioning the market in the hierarchy of man's priorities?

3. FRIEDMAN VERSUS KEYNES-SKIDELSKY

Let's start with Friedman's basic teaching. He took for granted that capitalism, as a huge profit-making mechanism, should and is able to take care of the wholeness of human lives under the condition that politicians leave the market function spontaneously. Plutocracy as an obsession with amassing, the *spiritus movens* of such a mechanism, was his unquestioned starting position. Average hominids, i.e. social individuals, were not perceived as distinctive, mysterious, unique beings, but as "human capital" (Friedman, 2009, p.102) or "human resources" (ibid, p.107), who serve the running of such an industry. Free market is a guarantee that their other individual goals, purposes, and freedoms could be realized in societies worldwide. (ibid, p.200) All kinds of "collective states" are considered to be a "horror". (ibid, p.201)

"Economic freedom is an end in itself. In the second place, economic freedom is also an indispensable means toward the achievement of political freedom". (ibid, p.8)
"Indeed, a major aim of the liberal is to leave the ethical problem for the individual to wrestle with it." (ibid, p.12)

Such a teaching begs for some questions. First of all, should some kind of obsession be left to determine the wholeness of human existence? Aren't we somehow rational beings by nature? Friedman admits that we are, primarily in foreseeing future events at the market and in being able to calculate future risks and to act accordingly – but, inside of his horizons, our rationality doesn't seem to be strong enough to deal with obsessions, to rule over them. Or, perhaps, thirst for infinite accumulation should be taken as a tolerable, even desirable, useful or noble obsession, which should not be questioned?

Secondly, does a free market exist at all? Has it ever existed? Do restrained or powerless governments prove the lack of market control – usually carried out invisibly by powerful politicians, intelligence agencies and media owners in tandem with omnipotent multinational companies? In addition, should one ignore the hidden world oligarchy of extremely rich ancient bankers' families intensively involved in semi-secret associations, like Bilderbergs, Trilateral Commission, Council on Foreign Relations, and many others? Perhaps they are not interested and not active in market regulation? Isn't there, from day to day, more and more evidence that at least in last several centuries the world events were and still are stage-managed by rude plutocrats? In *The Shock Doctrine* Naomi Klein offers a lot of well documented proves that they are. She announced them in this way:

"This book is a challenge to the central and most cherished claim in the official story – that the triumph of deregulated capitalism has been born of freedom, that unfettered free markets go hand in hand with democracy. Instead, I will show that this fundamentalist form of capitalism has consistently been midwived by the most brutal forms of coercion, inflicted on the collective body politic as well as on countless

individual bodies. The history of the contemporary free market – better understood as the rise of corporatism – was written in shocks.” (Klein, 2007, p.18-19)

Thirdly, could and should human beings be brought down, reduced to a sort of capital or resource – like real estate or natural raw-materials? On the other hand, is it really our natural existential position to be placed at somebody’s disposal, to be on call, available for some usage, perhaps like tools, sand or electricity?

Fourthly, are we truly self-made, autochthonous social individuals and simultaneously the only ones who should take responsibility for ethical issues? Do we grow up and pursue our goals and purposes intellectually and emotionally independently from others? Is collectivism avoidable at all? Isn’t some sort of it inherent to the human nature? On the other hand, should social institutions and collectives feel ethically irresponsible? Basically, does it make sense to speak about ethics at all in such an imagined extremely individualistic context?

Finally, how can any kind of freedom be an end in itself – freedom for the sake of freedom? And at the same time a means for some other sort of freedom. Does it make a logical sense? And, in general, are economic and political freedoms sufficient to offer us a fulfillment of living – or we find them desirable as means for some other, more essential, perhaps non-economic and non-political goals?

It seems that Friedman’s attempt to justify plutocracy left too many open questions, because his statements are based in too many prejudices or unconvincing evaluations. Nonetheless, his neoliberal theory was widely accepted not only by rich plutocrats, but also by scholars, namely economists who relayed on mathematically supported self-confidence in predicting the future of the market. Five years ago some of them, acting as bankers, made some crucial mistakes, and the market did not respond with an expected self-regulation. The recent crisis made visible some systematic theoretical errors and limits of our rational capabilities to foresee the future – surprisingly, much more visible than 40 years of ethically unacceptable, disastrous implementation of Friedman’s economic ideology worldwide.

What about ideas of Friedman’s opponent – Keynes? Let’s evoke some of them following his esteemed biographer Skidelsky. In his opinion, Keynes was “the most brilliant non-economist who ever applied himself to the study of economics”. (Skidelsky, 2009, p.55)

“Keynes was a moralist. There was always, at the back of his mind, the question: What is economics for? How does economic activity relate to the ‘good life’? How much prosperity do we need to live ‘wisely, agreeably, and well’? [...] Broadly, Keynes saw economic progress in freeing people from physical toil, so they could learn to live like the ‘lilies on the field’, valuing today over tomorrow, taking pleasure in the fleeting moment.” (ibid, p.xvii) His additional question was: “If growth is a means to an end, what is the end, how much growth is ‘enough’, and what

other valuable human purposes may be pre-empted by a single-minded concentration on economic growth?" (ibid, p.ix)

Obviously, Keynes's approach to economics and economy was pretty different from Friedman's. His standpoint was *outside* the economic science and all economic activities – primarily based in ethics. His ambition was to answer questions about the position and the role of the economic dimension of living in the broader context of human existence. In order to establish a "harmonious society" (ibid, p.190), he was teaching that

"the pursuit of money – what he called 'love of money' – was justified only to the extent that it led to a 'good life'. And a good life was not what made people better off: it was what made them good. To make the world ethically better was the only justifiable purpose of economic striving." (ibid, p.133) Therefore, "capitalism is merely an instrument. Liberty and justice, for example, are not 'goods in themselves' but means to the realization of intrinsic goods." (ibid, p.138)

In order to put capitalistic economy in the right course, Keynes recommended avoiding of "inescapable uncertainty about the future" (ibid, p.xv) by introducing "continuous role of government" (ibid, p.xvii) in the regulation of the market. In his opinion – opposite to Friedman's – future risks cannot be calculated in advance, because some amount of unpredictability always remains. Hence,

"prudence in face of the unknown is the key to Keynes's philosophy of statesmanship." (ibid, p.158) In addition, he "looked to an 'educated bourgeoisie' to set political standards to the community" (ibid, p.159), he "thought that, with the separation of management from ownership, public motives would increasingly come to dominate in the conduct of large enterprises. He did not foresee that the private interests of managers would come to take precedence in both private and public spheres". (ibid, p.166) Finally, "he treated justice instrumentally, as contributing to a 'contented' society. In this respect, he comes closest to the idea of justice as 'fairness'. By 'fairness' he usually meant the social arrangements generally accepted in the society he best knew, Britain." (ibid, p.147)

Such Skidelsky's interpretations and comments of Keynes's thoughts are supplemented with some more profound critical objections.

"Keynes's speculations on the theme of the 'love of money' are the nexus that binds together his ethical theory and his economic theory. But the coherence is only partial. His economic theory attacks the hoarding aspect of 'love of money', but not the priority given to moneymaking. [...] So, one has put up with what is 'faul' to get quickly to 'fair'. But a life dedicated to a 'faul' set of values cannot be an entry ticket to a life with a 'fair' set." (ibid, p.146)

Therefore, he calls Keynes's speculations "ethical utopia". (ibid.) Later, after listing Keynes's basic ideas, he states:

"Having said this, it is easy to see that he might have been deluding himself. He envisaged a modern capitalist economy governed by a Platonic ideal, and gentlemanly codes of behavior. But once the capitalist genie is let out of the bottle it

cannot be pressed into the service of pre-modern ethics of a good life and pre-modern codes of behavior. The good life in the classical sense presupposes that human desire has some ultimate end, or *telos*, whereas modern economic theory and life presuppose that it is insatiable. As regards behavior, he took for granted a class-based system of values which economic progress was undermining. These were contradictions which Keynes never fully faced.” (ibid, p.153)

On the basis of experiencing social life more than half century after Keynes’s death, Skidelsky expressed two key-insights of his own:

1. “Today we would say that the Moore-Keynes goal of maximizing the quantity of goodness in the universe cannot provide an agreed criterion for economic action, because rational people disagree about what is good. Economics therefore is bound to take wants as data and treat the maximization problem in terms of wants satisfaction. This is a problem for any attempt to marry ethics and economics. We can ease it, but not remove it entirely, by constructing indexes of ‘well-being’ which contain ‘quality-of-life’ measures.” (ibid, p.140)

2. “An economy devoted to the manufacture of goods may be said to have a natural terminus when wants are satisfied. Advertising may postpone it, but it cannot remove the day of fulfillment. But an economy which makes money into goods has no such cutoff point because, as Keynes said, abstract money will always seem more attractive than concrete goods. Our imaginations race ahead of our senses, filling us with unsatisfied desires, and money is the continuous stimulator of our imagination, creating a perpetual sense of dissatisfaction with what we already have.” (ibid, p.145)

Finally, as a sort of solution of the problem, he states that “we need a new synthesis, in which government is accepted as non-benevolent, but market forces are not thereby totally rehabilitated.” (ibid, p.173)

4. SPECIFYING THE PROBLEM

Yes, we would agree with Skidelsky, we need a new synthesis in order to establish – as Keynes calls it – harmonious society. But, what kind of synthesis? Both of them are concerned with the relationship between markets and governments as the key-factor in solving broader problems – e.g. just mentioned relativism of values and the lack of limits in striving for abstract wealth and in satisfying endless desire. Weren’t they perceived as the biggest obstacles not only in taking care of ethics at the social level, but also in an individual experience of meaningful living?

Widespread and radical relativism and the lack of limits, leading into nihilism, were the topic of Nietzsche’s thoughts, almost century and half ago. His deep insights in dimensions of the modern crisis of humanity made it clear that pure economic problems were just a particular aspect of much wider and more profound crisis of the “working culture” itself. In the aphorism entitled *Leisure and idleness* Nietzsche (1976, p.259) states:

“Even now one is ashamed of resting, and prolonged reflection almost gives people a bad conscience. One thinks with a watch in one’s hand, even as one eats one’s midday meal while reading the latest news of the stock market; one lives as if one always ‘might miss something’. ‘Rather do anything than nothing’: this principle,

too, is merely a string to throttle all culture and good taste. [...] If sociability and the arts still offer any delight, it is the kind of delight that slaves, weary of their work, devise for themselves. [...] Soon we may well reach the point where people can no longer give in to the desire of *vita contemplativa* (that is, taking a walk with ideas and friends) without self-contempt and a bad conscience.”

The attentive lecture of at least Nietzsche’s works would have helped both Keynes and Skidelsky to realize that, even though the powerful bankers, managers and politicians, together with the leading economists, might shape destinies of billions of people, their deeds are *not the cause*, but an *expression* of the contemporary crisis, and hence *cannot* solve it – no matter how much ethically aware or benevolent they are, and how much they let each others act independently. Even if they were the cause of the corruption of humanity, does it imply that they are able to correct it?

It seems that the “working culture” itself, as a sort of unnatural social disharmony, should be taken as the core of the problem. But, in order to face the problem appropriately, one should ask about the condition of possibility not only of a workaholic culture, but even more, of *any* culture in which *any* kind of obsession, i.e. lust or passion, rules over reasonable ideas and evaluations. Where to search for it, if not in human nature? Some deeper insights might prove that the whole context of contemporary living, including plutocracy, is perhaps just a new modification of something that was historically and essentially *déjà vu*.

Another Nietzsche’s aphorism, entitled *How things will become more “artistic” in Europe*, suggests that it’s exactly the case. The aphorism deals with the more profound and widespread phenomenon – man’s obsession with acting, improvising, and experimenting with himself. Having started in the Periclean age in Athens, it was suppressed in the Middle Ages, and revitalized in modern times, in America as well as in Europe. What are its social consequences?

“For what is dying out is the fundamental faith that would enable us to calculate, to promise, to anticipate the future in plans of such scope, and to sacrifice the future to them – namely, the faith that man has value and meaning only insofar as he is *a stone in a great edifice*; and to that end he must be *solid* first of all, a ‘stone’ – and above all not an actor!

To say it briefly (for a long time people will still keep silent about it): What will not be built any more, is – a society in the old sense of that word; to build that, everything is lacking, above all the material. *All of us are no longer material for a society*; this is a truth for which the time has come.” (Nietzsche, 1976, p.303-304)

It seems that the source of the global confusion and crisis has its roots deeper in us, even beyond the modern workaholism: we don’t hesitate to ignore all natural boundaries, because “the individual becomes convinced that he can do just about everything and *can manage almost any role*” (ibid.). Hence, we became again, like in ancient times, unpredictable actors, improvisers unable to perform any long-lasting social role – but now being simultaneously exposed to “breathless haste”, which deprives us of true

cultural values, taste, delight, even any serious thinking. Extreme relativism of social roles imbued with radical deprivations – can it offer or create anything good?

But maybe Nietzsche was wrong!? He claimed all of that long time ago. However, wouldn't it be hard to prove that his diagnosis isn't nowadays even truer? For, it's impossible to deny that man today is increasingly and systematically cut off from too many constitutive elements of traditionally perceived humanity. Hence, a "new synthesis" should perhaps primarily tend towards connecting confused individuals, tired workers-actors, with their human essence or authentic nature, and, in addition, towards joining such refreshed beings in some sort of originally human community. Could it be achieved by synthesizing somehow the existing governments and the market? Is it primarily a political-economic task?

Around two and half millenniums ago – exactly in the Periclean age, in some essential aspects very similar to ours – there was a philosopher who inspired Nietzsche and some others to deal with such tricky traits and deprivations of human nature and their mental, intellectual, and social consequences. He was searching not only for the *origin* of man's obsessions, but also for the long-lasting *prevention* of social problems caused by "artistic" and furious lusts or attitudes.

5. PLATO

According to Plato's basic insight into human nature, we are not initially and primarily rational beings, but beings exposed to pain and pleasure. Our spontaneous behavior is irrational escaping from pain towards pleasure. The most painful feeling is the one of the limitedness of our lifetime, caused by the awareness of our mortality. We don't know what death is, hence we are afraid of it. We only know that it's some sort of stiffness and resting of our body, and we feel that aging makes us more and more inflexible and immovable. Therefore, even as kids we instinctively try to escape from it into the pleasure of frantic moving and shouting, striving for permanent pleasure if possible.

Pleasure itself is furious, it tends to get rid of any form or limitation, and drives towards absence of law, wantonness, self-admiration, trendiness, shamelessness, muddle, and self-conceit. At the social level, the domination of pleasure leads necessarily to injustice.

In *The Republic*, Plato (Burnet, 1900-1907, vol. IV) positioned the people ruled by lust and pleasure – the vast majority – into the third social class: only they were allowed to have private property and to enjoy wealth, but they were strictly separated from any kind of governing city-state and of making decisions about social life as a whole. In that way plutocracy could never be socially established, because the rich would be subjected to those who, in the process of educational selection, showed higher and broader

abilities: to protect or to rule the state. The constitution of their souls should become free of lust, greed, fear or immoderate pleasure. The rulers should be those who are *panoptikoi* – able to comprehend the wholeness and the hierarchy of human ideas, feelings, attitudes, and activities, and to rule by giving each of them an adequate importance and role. Doing so, they would establish justice: everybody's engagement in a domain of his/her abilities and competencies. More precisely:

“Justice of a polis does not simply consist of everybody's performing his own tasks – that is, Socrates says, an outward doing one's own, and only the image of justice. The heart of justice is achieved if each individual, doing his own, becomes reasonable, true, and just. It means that inner order, harmony, friendship, and interconnectedness of the whole – in one word: justice and the beauty of the soul – does not rescue or support only someone's job which corresponds to his natural abilities, but first of all him personally, as the actuality of his own nature, established by the performed job.” (Šegedin, 2012, p.100)

In his latest work, *Laws*, Plato (Burnet, 1900-1907, vol. V) presented the way how to intensify basic educational efforts in order to overcome drive towards excessive pleasure. In accordance with the ancient, almost forgotten practice, he found emotional influence – persuasion and instigation – more efficient than rational one. During repeated celebrations filled with divine gifts – like wine and music-dance full of rhythm and harmony – citizens should exercise how to fight with pleasure in a tricky way: not by escaping from it, but by facing it in playing festal games controlled by older and reasonable ones, enjoying it, and, simultaneously, restraining it. The expected outcome should be fearlessness in accepting our own mortality, and, in addition, modesty, shyness, tranquility, and everything else contrary to what was already mentioned as a destructive trait of pleasure. In other words:

“Plato's demand, on which all his efforts in *Laws* are focused, is: man should be strong enough to live through his lifetime ‘in conformity with the core of his nature’ (804b1), i.e. being a god's toy – what truly is his best trait – he should live ‘playing the most beautiful games’ (803c). [...] Playing game really is the hardest and the most serious activity, it is exactly the biggest and the most difficult war which alone trains us for genuine fearlessness and complete virtue. In game one experiences entire mysteriousness and wonder of his own nature, and exercises courage to endure essential ignorance and to spend life in harmony with such a nature. Incurably and inevitably mortal, he awakens and develops in himself – by playing game – shyness, which prevents him from abandoning his nature in the case of intoxication with the seductiveness of pleasure. Life in game – as an imitation of god's serenity during withstanding man's essential ignorance and during living without retreat man's mortality – being ‘the best life’ is ‘the truest tragedy’ and ‘the most brilliant drama’ (817b).” (Barbarić, 1986, p.80)

Establishing our own natural attitude by playing hard and beautiful games; being exposed to pleasure but not being overcome by it; being permanently at war with ourselves in order to become brave enough to face reality – all of that *versus* unconditional surrender to fear and obsessive

search for pleasure in escaping from our genuine nature: escaping into “theatrocracy” (Plato) or tireless improvising and workaholism (Nietzsche), as well as – into plutocracy.

6. COMPARISONS

Close to the end of his book Skidelsky discusses how to educate future economists. He recommends to educators:

“They would take as their motto Keynes’s dictum that ‘economics is a moral and not a natural science’: that the economist should be ‘mathematician, historian, statesman and philosopher... in some degree’, and that ‘no part of man’s nature or his institutions must be entirely outside his regard’”. (Skidelsky, 2009, p.189)

Keynes himself was all of that, but maybe not in a sufficient degree, because his social ideas were obviously utopian. His idea of justice was geographically and essentially pretty limited, his expectations from managers separated from ownership were proved unreasonable, and his notion of “educated bourgeoisie” remained inadequately determined. And above all, one should agree with Skidelsky’s objection that living under the rule of immoderate, plutocratic drives and pleasures cannot lead to the rule of moderation and modesty, namely to living “wisely, agreeably, and well” – it simply does not match with human nature. Basically, Keynes let Plato’s lowest class (*The Republic*) or untrained citizens (*Laws*) rule the state, expecting from them some kind of self-regulation, namely, self-transformation into something opposite from what they are. Friedman had similar expectations from the world market: no matter how people behave, what they are obsessed with, what mistakes they make – the free market should spontaneously correct all of them and establish a sort of ethically neutral economic harmony. Therefore, compared with Plato’s ideas, Keynes might be called a naïve idealist; but compared to the doctrine of Friedman’s Chicago School, he might be called a deep and refined humanist.

“The Chicago School strain of capitalism does indeed have something in common with other dangerous ideologies: the signature desire for unattainable purity, for a clean slate on which to build a reengineered model society. This desire for godlike powers of total creation is precisely why freemarket ideologues are so drawn to crises and disasters. Nonapocalyptic reality is simply not hospitable to their ambitions... It is in these malleable moments, when we are psychologically unmoored and physically uprooted, that these artists of the real plunge in their hands and begin their work of remaking the world.” (Klein, 2007, p.20-21)

Anyhow, the point of contact in the teachings mentioned above – except Friedman’s – is emphasizing *immodesty* as the main problem, and the role of *education* in solving it. The main distinction between Plato and Keynes-Skidelsky lays in the positioning of the source of the problem: two of them place the main confrontation between market forces and governments; Plato places it inside human nature – between reason and drives, self-control and surrendering to pleasure. In his opinion, the essential

purpose of educational training is to encourage and to enable human reason to fight permanently and successfully with our weaknesses, primarily with hedonism, which is the root, among other things, of plutocracy – in human soul as well as in society. Keynes, on the other side, was too tolerant towards unrestrained hedonism: he didn't realize its long-lasting destructive and irreparable impact – at the individual and at the social level. Skidelsky is aware of all of that, but still thinks that a shift in political-economic relations might overcome plutocratic drive and solve the crisis successfully.

One might ask: Is it really important who appears to be a temporary master on the world stage – businessman, politician, or average consumer – if each of them is submitted to the domination of pleasure: the obsession with infinite profit, unlimited power, unending consumption, mixed with each other? Isn't such a global "society" necessarily a vicious circle of competition, manipulation, ruthlessness, aggression, deception, threatening, etc. in a public life, and confusion, stressfulness, illusive enthusiasm, exhausting fight, disappointment and depression, superstition, fruitless consolation, etc. in an everyday life of individuals?

Is such an obsessive and hectic life together with its variations a desirable or at least our single option? Do we have any publicly widely accepted, clear idea of some essentially different paradigm of living – based not in dreams, but in human nature? Nevertheless, it doesn't seem hard to realize that the only way how to oppose the crisis of humanity – which includes economic, political, environmental, identity crises, crisis of confidence and self-confidence, of marriage, family, etc. – is the establishment of such an *education* which is directed towards *overcoming all immoderate tendencies* in human souls by making people brave enough to face finiteness and natural limitations of everything we deal with, including ourselves.

Hence, plutocratic drive inside and outside of us should not be controlled for the sake of some other form of immoderate obsession, but in order to introduce the opposite paradigm of living, which primarily includes permanent fighting for – always temporary – establishment and re-establishment of *right measure* in human souls and in society as a whole. How to control plutocracy? Should we, at least for the beginning, obsessively fight with it?

Pascal Bruckner offered an answer in his awarded book *Misery of Prosperity. The Religion of Market and Its Enemies*:

"To be an 'anti-capitalist' first of all means to stop being obsessed with capitalism, to think of something else. *Instead of being against, why not to step aside, to get out of the way?* We do it by changing the signs of luxury, at least individually: free time instead of big salaries, meditation instead of hectic manner, spiritual life instead of mercantile fever, small communities instead of wide world, isolation with chosen friends instead of loneliness in crowd." One should "validate as higher everything what doesn't strictly belong to the category of usefulness, uncountable goods: poetry, love, erotic, contemplation of nature, solidarity, everything what surpasses man, what

lifts him up, releases him from his narrow-mindedness, his monetary mediocrity, his maniacal compulsion to accumulate.” (Bruckner, 2004, p.142-143)

Couldn't this be taken as an unintentional description of the members of Plato's two higher social classes from *The Republic* or well-trained citizens from *Laws* – who let the majority of people remain too weak to oppose plutocratic lust, but who *didn't let them rule* the city-state?

7. CONCLUSION

Let's ask again: If we value Plato's, Nietzsche's, Bruckner's or similar ways of thinking which emphasize fighting for the establishment of moderation and measure as a strange and useless, in this moment globally inapplicable idealization – what remains? It's evident that there are many “realistic” options left – but all of them *accept status quo*, either explicitly or implicitly, either being aware of it or not. For, all ideas of change and reform which do not *touch and try to cut off at the roots* of the problem, make it less visible and indirectly endorse it: economic ideas, as well as historical, technological, political, philosophical, educational, environmental, etc. Doing so, they – mostly unintentionally, but efficiently supporting all those who intentionally manipulate people's mind and imagination – inhibit us in facing natural puzzles, challenges, and tasks related to experiencing and developing our authentic humanity. They introduce more and more confusion, disorientation, and unrealistic expectations in individual souls and public opinions, transforming plutocracy into “idiocracy”.

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