

19th PCSF 2019
Professional Culture of the Specialist of the Future

**THE IDEALS OF ANTIQUITY IN THE MORAL DEVELOPMENT
OF FUTURE PROFESSIONALS**

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Abstract

The paper identifies the role played by the societal ideals of classical antiquity in the development of fledgling talent. Using the rational reconstruction method supported by the historicism principle, the author shows how the exploration of ancient societal ideals can contribute to the building of political and moral culture of future professionals. The examination of these ideals helps undergraduates develop a comprehensive view of society as a spiritual organism that promotes the free development of every individual. The significance of competent and ethical service to society highlighted by Plato is what makes this topic relevant for every new generation. The study argues that the Hellenistic ideal of the free citizen developed by Aristotle opens the students' mind to understanding the need to protect private interest from being absorbed by an impersonal social unity. The author demonstrates how critical reflection on the ideas of ancient thinkers helps future professionals refrain from utopianism in the treatment of social objectives. Overall, the exploration of ideals of antiquity facilitates students' understanding of the dialectic of the general and the particular, the eternal and the transitory, the national and the cosmopolitan in social life. Learning these ropes of political and ethical thinking is a necessary condition of growing culturally developed, integrity-driven, well-educated and free citizens of our society.

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Keywords: Societal ideal, classical antiquity heritage, moral development, spiritual organism, utopianism, ideal of the free citizen.



1. Introduction

The heritage of classical antiquity is a source of timeless values, norms and models which have had a significant influence on culture and mentality of every new generation of aspiring professionals all over the world. This is perfectly true for Russia, as Russian mentality and identity cannot exist independently of universal spiritual and cultural references and global communication processes. The examination of Plato's and Aristotle's ideas lies at the core of building the cultural identity of aspiring professionals (including those in management). The works of these important philosophers of Ancient Greece laid the moral foundations for the study of social and political life. It should be emphasized that, across humanities disciplines, the ideas of ancient thinkers have a particular appeal for undergraduates. As long as appropriate encouragement and mentoring is provided to students by the teacher, these ideas can become an essential life-long cultural resource enabling the fledgling professionals to have clear ethical standards guiding their interpretation and moral evaluation of social and political processes underway.

A review of Russian and foreign literature shows that the societal ideals of ancient classical thinkers have been the focus of considerable attention. An in-depth analysis of the topic in the context of science journalism and education was undertaken by prominent Russian philosophers such as Asmus (2009), Losev and Takho-Godi (2005) and Chanyshev (2011). They succeeded in providing a detailed presentation of the material in a form accessible to students. More recently there have appeared several other writings on the subject that contain well-prepared analysis of the ideals of classical antiquity. Particularly worthy of mention are textbooks by Ableev (2018), Gryadovoy (2018) and Bessonov (2019). However, limited by curriculum demands, these authors tend to address the societal ideals of classical thinkers only briefly. Foreign literature treats the topic mainly as a matter of academic interest. Especially notable in this regard are the following works: an exhaustive study of Plato's social views published by Cambridge University Press and edited and introduced by Ferrari (2000); Barker's (2012) book dealing with the political thought of Plato and Aristotle; a comparative study of the teachings of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas carried out by the talented Austrian scholar Maier (2002). We also cannot fail to mention the book on Plato's *Republic* published under the direction of Duxsaut (2005) as well as the interesting paper by Kauffmann (2011) that discusses different political regimes as described in Aristotle's *Politics*. All above mentioned works make their distinctive contribution to the study of ancient heritage, but do not provide a complete account of the role of the societal ideals of antiquity in the development of future professionals. These writings proceed from an a priori assumption that students have a sufficiently high level of education.

2. Problem Statement

The research problem is to identify the extraordinary role played by the societal ideals of classical antiquity in building the political and moral culture of the students majoring in humanities or management science.

3. Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following questions: What is the ethical and socially constructive role of the societal ideals of classical antiquity in cultural development of future professionals? How should

aspiring professionals consider the mission of state- and lower level management elites? What has produced narrow-minded ideals offering a confined, not-to-be-challenged view of social being? Why an evolutionary approach to the treatment of societal ideals is important? Who, and by what means, overcame the limitations of classical antiquity in understanding the dialectic of the general and the particular, the national and the cosmopolitan?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to reveal the extraordinary creative potential of classical ancient societal ideals for cultural development of future professionals and to articulate the key issues associated with embracing the stance. The paper intends to show that learning to critically scrutinize ancient societal ideals and to identify their relevant and timeless features helps young professionals grasp universal socially significant values of the world civilisation in the domain of social development; enhances their political and moral awareness; develops heuristic thinking and ability to avoid futile utopianism and radicalism in understanding the social dynamics.

5. Research Methods

The study draws upon theoretical tenets of contemporary social philosophy. Accordingly, the analysis of societal ideals and their role in the training of future professionals proceeds from the premises that society should be studied as an entirety grasped in its overall historical evolution, with the spiritual realm being a crucial determinant of social development. The study uses the rational reconstruction method and a multilateral approach to the problem. It is based on the assumption that studying the heritage of classical antiquity should come with acknowledgement of its undeniable merits but also of its historical limitations, which helps refrain from uncritically apologetic attitude.

6. Findings

1. Plato's and Aristotle's societal ideals are traditionally studied during the first years of undergraduate education and early curriculum stages. When discussing the timeless significance of classical philosophers' ideas, particular focus should be given to the fact that Plato was the first to provide the ultimate moral principle of political and social life. This principle cannot be set aside and must be respected in current times as well. Plato held that the purpose of the state is to promote cultural and intellectual excellence of people rather than to indulge in wars and commercialism. Material prosperity is just a means to the end. Plato passed down to the younger generation the firm belief that the person's and the state's *raison d'être* is not limited to everyday, mundane aspects, but rather is associated with the pursuit of a higher good and truth, with ability 'to attain [the greatest] knowledge' and 'ascend until [you] arrive at the good' (Plato, trans. 1982, p. 260). The thinker was able to look at social issues from the ethical perspective. Furthermore, it was Plato who first offered a continually relevant critique of immoral social practices and forms of government (tyranny, oligarchy, etc.) driven by moneymaking, self-interest, idols of the crowd, acquisitiveness, i.e. relative and conditional values. Plato countered these idols with the ideal of virtuous life based on the principle of fairness understood as 'repayment of a debt' (Plato, trans. 1982, p. 9).

2. Future professionals can enrich their thinking by grasping the ancient philosopher's idea of the knowledgeable, sophisticated and ethically sound elite having a fundamental role in holistic development of the state. This idea remains of central relevance for today's political and economic consciousness of Russian society. Plato's belief that those at the helm of the state should be the wisest of people, or spiritual aristocrats — rather than the flaunty new-rich, the crooked establishment — is as much relevant for current students as it was for citizens of the Greek poleis. As Plato put it: 'Neither the uneducated and uninformed of the truth, nor yet those who never make an end of their education, will be able ministers of State' (Plato, trans. 1982, p. 260). Students can be expected to recognize that in case Plato's vision is not implemented in present-day Russian society, improving lives would not be possible. Another socially significant point about Plato's works is the demand that all citizens competently serve the interests of society, where every person is assigned a place according to his/her abilities.

3. Developing a comprehensive perspective of the tasks of the state and society is crucial for building the competence of future professionals. Particularly important is Plato's idea that the state and society constitute a single spiritual organism. Drawing on his views, students will see that what lies at the heart of social development is not atomistic fragmentation, but rather the concept of symphonic unity of life built on principles of fairness. The philosopher wrote: 'If we bring people who are sound of limb and mind to so great a subject and training, and educate them in it, even justice itself won't blame us, and we'll save the city' (Plato, trans. 1992, p. 208). Plato proclaimed the still relevant goal to establish a harmonic congruence between social groups, each of them performing its particular function and contributing to the common good. No less fruitful for today's world is the philosopher's point that the improvement of social life is associated with moral enhancement of every human being.

4. The enduring relevance of the cultural heritage of classical antiquity is also evident in that the study of Plato's works helps future professionals understand the following: along with timeless, fundamental components, the teachings of great thinkers include transitory, ephemeral aspects. By debunking misconceptions in philosophers' thinking, undergraduates learn to gain insight into recurrent error patterns documented throughout human history when it comes to implementing societal ideals. In Plato's writings it is seen in the gap between the ideal and reality. As Plato realizes that the notions of the absolute Good and unconditional Truth cannot be put into practice, he — like many other utopians — resorts to the means of betterment of society based on tokenism and ignoring ethical concerns. He supports perpetuating slavery and approves of the abolition of the private property for the ruling class, noting in his *Republic* that things will be 'in no way private but common to all' (Plato, trans. 1992, p. 213). The philosopher promotes dictatorial compliance as well as the dissolution of family ties and individual liberty. He looks down upon simple, 'inferior' forms of economic activity with an aristocratic fastidiousness and is unable to acknowledge the value of every kind of labour, which was subsequently fulfilled by Christianity. Committed to his ideals, Plato fails to work out the dialectic of the general and the particular, the task which remains today as important as ever. Plato's state ultimately transforms into an impersonal unity.

5. Exploring the ideals of classical antiquity may also help students identify the epistemological reasons for narrow-minded social attitudes of Greek thinkers. These result from the ineradicable human urge to see the end of history, to behold the precise outlines of the future. Therefore, students will be able to understand that, with such attitudes, the philosopher's inward eye is deceived by an illusion, as transitory

features are mistaken for immutable ones. Bulgakov (2015) wrote on this point: ‘These earthly ideals are created one after another, the earthly city being mentally constructed and its plan and design being developed. In the ancient world, this dream was most evident in *The Republic* by Plato who built a city of the earth as a kind of pagan monastery’ (p. 94). As future professionals critically reflect on the classical utopian constructions of the ancient scholar, they will come to grips with the importance of evolutionary (rather than static) approach to history. They will understand the fallacy of the urge Plato gave in to — the longing to see the end of history and regard transitory, ephemeral features as everlasting ones. Students will need to realize that a lack of historical perspective in the philosopher's societal ideal makes it impossible to answer the burning heuristic question posed by his whole body of his work: what will happen after his project is completed, and what is the fate of those who refuse to embrace it? When addressing this question, students will be called upon to understand that the answer to this question was given by later thinkers rather than Plato himself. These thinkers did not reduce the implementation of societal ideals to purely external and organizational measures, but rather considered it as a continuous process of social relations improvement inextricably linked to internal, moral and spiritual betterment of individuals.

6. To develop the culture of thinking among soon-to-be professionals, the latter also need to critically evaluate the societal ideal of Aristotle. Plato's most brilliant pupil partly succeeded in overcoming the limitations of his teacher's views: Aristotle pointed out that there can be no single ‘best’ societal ideal suitable for all times and places, as the reality each time demands an answer to the question: ‘What regime is advantageous for which cities, and what sort for which sort of persons?’ (Aristotle, trans. 2013, p. 117). Implementation of the ‘best’ ideals varies subject to local customs and traditions. That is why in his *Politics* Aristotle considers different forms of government in Athens, Sparta, Carthage, Thebes and other city-states. Thus, Aristotle was the first to introduce an empirical dimension in the consideration of social issues by arguing that the good legislator ‘should study not only the best regime but also the regime that is the best possible, and similarly also the regime that is easier and more attainable for all’ (Aristotle, trans. 2013, p. 98).

7. One essential task for students exploring Aristotle's societal ideal is imbibing his productive view of the state as a complex organism with multiple organs and functions. Future professionals should also be aware that it was Aristotle who presented to the civilized world the Hellenistic ideal of the free citizen who partakes in key political processes (judging, ruling, law-making). As the thinker defines the term ‘citizen’, he writes: ‘The citizen in an unqualified sense is defined by no other thing so much as by partaking in decision and office’ (Aristotle, trans. 2013, p. 63). It was the same Aristotle who protected private interest, family and private property from being absorbed by an impersonal social unity. The philosopher noted that ‘to seek to unify the city excessively is not good’ (Aristotle, trans. 2013, p. 27). He highlighted the positive role that a combination of aristocratic and democratic elements could play in society. Aristotle can thus be regarded as a herald of a modern civilized European state.

8. The next stage of developing students' cultural thinking should focus on the point that societal ideals of both Plato and Aristotle referred to narrowly interpreted national tasks. In his *Republic* Plato expressly stated that the fair state ‘is bound to be’ Greek (Plato, trans. 1992, p. 146). For ancient classical philosophers, people living together within a state aimed at achieving an ideal goal were just Greeks wishing to escape from barbarians. And ‘barbarians are more slavish in their characters than Greeks’ (Aristotle,

trans. 2013, p. 88). Further, whereas Plato saw society as a means of making the heavenly world of ideas a reality, Aristotle's bias was to overemphasize the tasks of the earthly human world. Thus, as a result of examination of societal ideals of Greek philosophers, future professionals will see that classical ancient thinkers never got round to overcoming the duality of the national and the global, the class-specific and the universal, the transitory and the eternal. Only the synthesis between those early insights and the ideas of subsequent thinkers was effective in creatively transforming the national and pagan elements of ancient Greeks' teachings. That said, students should keep in mind that although many things in the teachings of classical Greek philosophers proved transitory, the universal principles expressed in their reflections on the state and society did not vanish utterly: through Augustine's work they found way initially into medieval philosophy and then into the teachings of the Modern period as well. Note that, highlighting the outstanding intellectual potential of Greek philosophers, the prominent Russian scholar Solovyov (1891/1989) wrote: 'While Plato and Aristotle did not make history per se, they influenced it greatly' (p. 404).

9. Cultural development of future professionals includes, among other things, studying the societal ideals of other ancient teachings that partly overcame the limitations of Plato's and Aristotle's conceptions. In this context, undergraduates should be introduced to political and universalist views of the Stoics. Students ought to know that the signature proponent of the philosophy of Stoicism Marcus Aurelius managed to set forth a role model of a statesman who demanded of himself not only to exemplify a grand mind and wisdom, but also a fair, merciful and tolerant attitude to people. The philosopher pointed out that every citizen should serve the interests of the whole community and be compassionate to fellow beings. Thinking of himself as a citizen of the universe, or the world state, Marcus Aurelius considered a disregard for common interests to be the greatest evil. He considered all mankind as one family. Marcus Aurelius (trans. 2011) wrote: 'We have come into being to work together, like feet, hands, eyelids, or the two rows of teeth in our upper and lower jaws. To work against one another is therefore contrary to nature; and to be angry with another and turn away from him is surely to work against him' (p. 10).

10. When students examine the societal ideal of Stoic sages, they are for the first time introduced to the ancient cosmopolitan idea that everyone is equal before the global law: there can be no distinction between Greeks and barbarians, men and women, free and slaves. In Stoic teaching, an individual is seen as a citizen of the world who identifies himself as a member of a cosmic divine community, a higher city, where all people live as brothers, children of a common father. The cultural influence of this concept of global citizenship and equality has been immense. It served to overcome, at least in theory, the ethnic parochialism of ancient Greeks' societal ideals and contributed to the moral betterment of the mankind. The cosmopolitan Stoics did not turn human society into a Plato's 'beehive' where distinct human individuality is dissolved and absorbed. The Stoic doctrine promoted citizens' freedom and independence by arguing that pursuing private interests should not impede the freedom of others. Advocating their ideas on the streets and in the palaces alike, the Stoics addressed their ethical message to all educated people without discriminating between Greeks and barbarians, free and slaves.

11. A further way for young professionals to develop their cultural awareness is to reconsider theoretical insights of ancient philosophers by looking at the heritage of the thinker who straddled both worlds — antiquity and the medieval period. We are referring to St. Augustine who asserted the principle of freedom of conscience and held a linear view of history. His rejection of the 'earthly city' ideals

underpinned the process of elimination of national pagan elements inherent in Plato's and Aristotle's societal visions. Augustine articulated the ideal of the Kingdom of God — a Kingdom which is progressively unfolding in human communities. Thus he succeeded in overcoming the static and parochial character of earlier historical paradigms. Although the thinker did not answer all historiosophical questions, he was the first to introduce the notion of progress into the human interpretation of history. He viewed the progress of history as a process of moral improvement of mankind and thereby gave meaning to history. Exploring Augustine's societal ideal, students should appreciate the philosopher's ability to combine the universalist ideal of Rome with the Christian doctrine of the purpose of the world as a whole and the divine Law governing all creation. At the turning point of human evolution, Augustine's beliefs played a historically progressive role in saving the world's culture from wanton destruction. It was this aspect that led the prominent Russian scholar Troubetzkoy (1891) to write: 'The Latin ideal is first and foremost an ideal of a global law, a universal legal order. To defeat barbarians, it is necessary to counter them with an insuperable, superhuman law. The concept of the universal divine law that reveals itself in everything and subjugates everything is indeed central to Augustine's thought' (pp. 135-136).

7. Conclusion

Thus, we have considered the role of societal ideals of antiquity in building the moral culture of future professionals and found that examining those ideals helps students identify and understand not only material, but also spiritual dimension of political and social life. Students will realize that it was Plato who first provided the ultimate moral principle of political and social life that should be respected in present-day relationships as well. The exploration of this ideal will enable students to develop a comprehensive view of the state and society as a single spiritual organism. Furthermore, it will teach undergraduates to discern the indicators of anti-human forms of government and produce a well-argued critique of such regimes. Along with that, students will see that societal ideals are historically bound, limited by time and space. By creatively interpreting and comprehending Plato's and Aristotle's political ideas, soon-to-be professionals will be able to appreciate the significance of competent and ethical governance conceived as selfless service to all. The topic will open the students' mind to the Aristotelian ideal of the free citizen. Equipped with this knowledge, they will be able to acknowledge the need to protect private interest against the threat of an impersonal social unity. Gaining an insight into societal ideals of antiquity provides students with a methodological key to reveal utopianism in social development; contributes to their understanding of the dialectic of the general and the particular, the eternal and the transitory, the national and the cosmopolitan in social life. Learning these ropes of political and ethical thinking compellingly expressed in ancient philosophy is a necessary condition of growing culturally developed, integrity-driven, well-educated and free citizens of our society.

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