

TOWARDS AN ETHICAL JUSTIFICATION OF POLITICS AND THE ECONOMY ACCORDING TO THE OBJECTIVE OF THE COMMON GOOD

Samuel Dimas and José Afonso Sousa

sdimas@fch.lisboa.ucp.pt

afonso.sousa@novabase.pt

(UCP – CEFi)

1. Introduction: for a politics focused on the Aristotelian ethical notion of a «good life»

In Classical Greece, the response to the Socratic question «how ought we to live» was central to the ethical debate. There was the conviction that a certain way of life was better than others regardless of personal tastes and interests. Aristotle considered that man, along with all other species, sought perfection and that would only happen on fully attaining the self-fulfilment of their essence. This path for seeking perfection was led through the very core of family household communities in the city and implied the fulfilment of a «happy and good life» (Aristotle, 1998, 22).

This «happy and good life» was not a life spent satisfying random, disordered desires, as Aristotle defended that the desires of man had to be cultivated and directed towards that which truly constituted the real goal of happiness. The «happy and good life» was a life that didn't result from the simple life in community but rather from the practice of «good actions». In order to attain the happiness of life in the community, man had to acquire this «civic virtue» that consisted of following the virtues inscribed in his spiritual nature. The best regime for governing the city is one which allows citizens «to perform the best actions and live happily». This way to reach happiness emerged out of the complementarity between political, practical living and the contemplative, philosophical life through exercising the virtues of courage, justice and prudence (Aristotle, 1998, 483).

Contemporary world seems to have relegated the ethical debate to the private domain in a completely different way, implementing its socio-economic order on a basis of axiological neutrality with radical autonomy of civic values. Is such a separation justified in the political philosophy of Aristotle who, contrary to that which had been affirmed by Plato (Plato, 1987, 363-410), defends that «the virtues of the good citizen and the good man are not absolutely identical» (Aristotle, 1998, 197)? Is it feasible that we might be «good citizens» without becoming «good persons»? Might we be able to establish an economic-political order aiming at happiness and wellbeing without maintaining the unity between ethical and civic values and without cultivating education to perform good deeds that provide the common good of justice and equality (Aristotle, 1998, 23)?

2. Correlation between ethics, religion and politics to promote a good life

Within the scope of this distinction introduced by Aristotle, the philosopher Leo Strauss considers that citizenship represents a legal-political bond between an individual and a political community, which establishes reciprocal social and economic duties and rights that do not depend on belonging to any particular language, religion or ethnic group. Contrary to the meaning attributed to «good citizen», which entirely depends on the regime, the meaning of «good man» is always and everywhere the same. Hence, the «good man» is identical to the «good citizen» only under the best regimes (Strauss, 1957, 343-368).

Therefore, the meaning of «citizen, necessarily, differs in each regime» (Aristotle, 1998, 189) because a «good citizen» is the one who complies with all civic requirements and this does not amount to a synonym for complying with every moral demand. These moral demands do not reflect the utilitarian and pragmatic impositions of any particular political regime, but rather enclose an ontological dimension and refer to principles that are inherent in the process of guaranteeing human dignity at any time and in any place. Nevertheless, it is important to note that, if in a democratic regime, the citizen is an

individual with the capacity to participate in the administration of justice and government, like the politician who governs, citizens have to establish the connection between their civic and ethical virtues.

However, returning to the Aristotelian distinction, we verify that it provides a classification of regimes, in accordance with the qualitative scale of their merits: depending on whether they are good or bad, straight or deviant, in accordance with the extent to which they adapt to the true goal of political life, which is the promotion of virtue and happiness of citizens through good legislation (Aristotle, 1998, 529-531). Although a political community is not entirely made up of good men, citizens ought to duly comply with their functions and that is their contribution to the perfect city. Furthermore, Aristotle recognises that responsible governors and rulers ought to have the civic virtues of the good citizen and the ethical virtues of the good man. Besides being a good citizen, the politician ought to be a prudent man (Aristotle, 1998, 197). The wisdom of practical knowledge enables the ruler to appropriately exercise the ability to command over the ruled, who are at least required to be good citizens (Aristotle, 1998, 537). In the rational dimension of man lies the ultimate purpose which consists of not only being a good citizen, but also a good man.

Therefore, according to Aristotle, the final goal of political life is virtue (Aristotle, 1998, 203-205) and, to this extent, the best regime is that which does not only strive for its own self-perpetuation but which is fundamentally concerned with the common good and it is within this context that Aristotle identifies the group of the correct regimes and determines those deviating from this standard (Aristotle, 1998, 211).

3. Law as an orientation of reason for the common good and the private good of blissfulness

Within the line of Aristotle's thinking, which presents the good life and happiness as the objectives of human action and following Saint Augustine, who describes human restlessness in the quest for stillness and divine peace, Saint Thomas Aquinas maintains that the ultimate

purpose of human life arises out of happiness or beatitude. In order to attain this state of perfection, there ought to be a perfect relationship between the internal principles of action, i.e., nature and habits, and the external principle of action that motivates man directly towards good, i.e., God, who acts through Law or with the assistance of Grace (Aquinas, 2005, 524-525).

By means of the law and reason inscribed in human nature, God instructs and guides human actions in the direction of the beatitude leading to full enjoyment of life and the attaining of private and common happiness. As man is not only a natural being and human beings orient themselves towards the transcendent spirit, there is, therefore, the need for a special revelation that adds to both natural law and human right the divine law revealed in the Holy Scriptures. In this way, law is defined as the orientation of reason towards the common good and towards the private good (Aquinas, 2005, 527-528).

According to this perspective, individuals cannot effectively achieve virtue, they may only warn and counsel but, if such warnings are spurned, they lack the coactive power that the law holds, to enable such a purpose. On the other hand, the people or public person who are responsible for applying penalties wield such power, and therefore become the only ones who can legislate (Aquinas, 2005, 525-526). However, this proclamation in «favour of positive law» only becomes possible because God has infused it in the human mind so that it would be naturally known (Aquinas, 2005, 528).

Men participate in the divine creation of law through the making of human laws, which consists in finding the right elements according to the divine and natural law. In this context, the law is a necessary and effective part of the return of man to God as, in reality «the whole community of the universe is governed by divine reason» (Aquinas, 2005, 529). By participating in divine providence, the rational creature receives, from the eternal law, a particular inclination towards fair actions, and that does not stem only from nature but also from individual will (Aquinas, 2005, 530). This participation of the rational being in the eternal law goes by the name of natural law. In turn, human law consists of the establishing of rules that apply natural law to concrete situations, i.e., the principles of natural law should serve the common

good and need to be correspondingly clear and adapted to the respective prevailing time and space (Aquinas, 2005, 532-534).

In addition to natural law and human law, Saint Thomas thus presents the need for a divine law imposed by God to direct and guide human life in a just and fair way, because human life is structured according to the purpose of eternal beatitude, which exceeds the natural capacity of its faculties (Aquinas, 2005, 535). In keeping with this argument, there is a distinction between human legislation, carried out in accordance with the natural capacities, and divine legislation, which is perfect and also capable of judging internal actions and every type of wrongdoing which escape the reaches of human law. The perfection of virtue requires man to be ruled by another law.

However, can we deduce that, in Saint Thomas, human law only refers to the conditions of the «good citizen» in some specific regime and that, in order to become a «good man» and order oneself around the goal of eternal beatitude, it would be necessary to obey not only the laws of man but also the law of God? Does the law, understood as the prescription of practical reason on behalf of a leader governing a particular, so called perfect community, refer only to the civic virtue of the good citizen in any specific regime or does it also encapsulate the ethical virtue of the good man? Is divine law required to enlighten human law only for believers or for all men whose final purpose is to attain the good life, the common good and eternal beatitude?

Furthermore, how might we say that the «purpose of the law is to make humans good» when Thomas Aquinas considers that human goodness stems from virtue and that this stems from God «who infuses it in us, without our awareness»? And once it is out of kindness that men obey the law, considering that goodness comes prior to the law, how might we say that it is the law that renders human good? And in what way may the law make good those who believe that by obeying it, contribute to the common welfare, but do not act correctly for their own good? Finally, how do we conceive that making men good is within the scope of the law when we know that certain laws are tyrannical, failing to ensure the wellbeing of the subjects and seeking their own purposes instead?

4. The Thomist distinction between «absolutely good men» and «good men within the order of a particular regime»

The response given by Thomas Aquinas to these questions and objections corresponds not to any distinction between the civic virtues of good citizens and the moral virtues of good men but rather between the moral virtue regulated by the divine justice of good men and the civic virtue of good men as regards a specific regime on the assumption that the virtue of the subjects arises out of submitting to their rulers through obedience to the law, even when it is tyrannical and in the recognition that, in this case, humans are not absolutely good but relatively good within the scope of any particular regime (Aquinas, 2005, 543).

This correspondingly reflects the position of Saint Thomas Aquinas in which the only regime able to make men absolutely good is that in which there is a coincidence between civic virtue and ethical virtue. Thus, he accepts that the ruler may not possess these two virtues and that, in such a case, the best form of government elected by all may rapidly deteriorate into the worst. Royal government is the best regime for the people as long as it does not become corrupted. However, due to the great power the king possesses, it is also true that his government easily turns into tyranny whenever the virtue of those holding power, fail to attain perfection. What, however, happens is that there are few holding perfect virtue since it is only granted to those who know how to meditate on divine law, always in fear of and obedient to God (Aquinas, 2005, 768).

Why is the justice of divine law insistently referred to? In fact, the power of deciding between good and evil does not belong to man but only to God. However, reason is the site of its discernment and the interlocutor in this moral order is human freedom and hence moral virtue appears as a conflict between the «liberty» (of the subject) and the «mandated rule» (of God). To this extent, moral virtue cannot be approached within the framework of an absolute sovereignty of reason as there is no total autonomy of reason with the total absence of revelation.

Therefore, the formulation of the role of reason and faith in establishing the moral laws that refer to the specific behaviours relative to

the specific subject, to the others and to the world of things, implies divine revelation conveying a specific and determined, universally valid and permanent moral content. This correspondingly means that the word of God is not limited to handing down some exhortation that autonomous reason would only have to complete with the specific, truly objective, normative determinations, i.e., appropriate to the concrete historical context, but that it needs to be assimilated and assumed in the exercise of human virtues and of the virtues of grace expressed within the context of the old law.

Thus, the light of natural reason, which distinguishes the good from the evil, proves nothing more than the remains of the divine light in each one of us. This is termed natural law once the reason which stipulates it arises out of human nature. This classical concept of «natural law» and its consequences for approaching moral virtue derives from the Greeks (the Stoics and Aristotle) and was assumed by the Holy Fathers and, above all, by Saint Thomas before undergoing a universalising expansion in the Modern Age through «universal natural law». Neo-Scholasticism adopts this as a predominantly abstract and a-temporal orientation, triggering reactions of resistance and disagreements from the contemporary fields of the Ethics of Philosophy and Moral Theology. However, this does not correspond to the original position of Saint Thomas that we are dealing with here.

5. The complementarity between natural law and the law of the revealed Spirit for establishing the perfect social order

In this sense, natural law is a participation of eternal law in the rational being to the extent that reason is enlightened by Divine Revelation and by faith (Augustini, 1891, 621-622). The law God handed down to His chosen people, beginning with the commandments given in the Sinai mountain, the same natural law, which Saint Thomas identified as the reason of divine wisdom and which drives everything to its appropriate end (Aquinas, 2005, 547), is completed and perfected by the new law of the Spirit or the «inner law», that is the «law of perfection and liberty». Through human law, man participates in divine rule

and, thus, the juridical structure instituted by Thomas Aquinas respects the structure of human existence, harmonising the personal reality with the perfect natural community that may correspond to peoples and nations.

Natural law, as inscribed into rational nature, favours the dignity of the human individual, establishing the foundations for their fundamental rights and duties, without entering into opposition against the singularity of human beings and their individual uniqueness. Due to the attention contemporary men pay to history and culture, the immutability of natural law has now been called into question. However, its own justified existence can only ever continue due to the existence, in man, of permanent and transcendental structural features that are beyond historical and cultural variations. There is no opposition between the universal character of natural law and the necessary adaptation or enculturation of the moral norms in different historical and cultural contexts.

In this way, God cares diligently for all of His creation (Sab. 7, 22; 8, 11), even while for man God set a different path: not based on the exterior, through the laws of physical nature, but rather from within, through the reason that recognises the eternal Law of God through natural light and so it is capable to indicate the fair and just path of free will. (reason and will, sense and liberty). Therefore, the natural law implies universality given that this is inscribed in the rational nature of people. Owing to the nature held in common by all beings, man tends towards good because every living form seeks for its own appropriate preservation. However, beyond this, there are special inclinations, man share with irrational animals, such as sexual intercourse and the education of offspring. Finally, rooted in its own appropriate rational nature, there is in man an inclination towards good, towards the knowledge of the truth of God and towards the knowledge about the essential facets of life in society such as avoiding ignorance and not offending others (Aquinas, 2005, 564-565). Running counter to a conception of pure nature and based upon the Christian anthropology of the creation of man in the image and similar to God, Thomas Aquinas defends the notion of the natural desire of God, with its satisfaction not occurring either in this or the next life only through gnostic cognitive

effort, but it occurs with the support of grace in the glory of eternal beatitude.

Once the rational soul shapes man, each individual tends to naturally act according to reason, this means the same as stating «acting virtuously». Every virtuous act belongs to the natural law and provides the foundations for the development of the «co-naturalness» between man and the true good, which is essential for man to be able to «understand the will of God, what is good, what is pleasing to him and what is perfect» (Rom. 12, 2). According to Saint Thomas, these are the necessary features to a social order that may be relative or absolutely good, depending on whether the law is governed by divine justice or not, and that reflects in the tension between the two fundamental juridical orders: the «rights of peoples», which universally derive from natural rational law, and the «civil law», which derives from the same law but through particular determinations in accordance with the specific characteristics of each respective State.

Thus, the question looms: in what ways does human law establish this division? If it is a fact that natural law is common to all nations, what is the role and framework for positive law? Thomas Aquinas holds no doubt about the need for the division of positive law into the *rights of peoples* and *civil law*. As the rights of people are rational and natural to man (natural law), this is a universal law and, therefore, man may easily find themselves in agreement in relation to the law. The same is no longer the case for the civil law determined by each State, corrupt and imperfect to a greater or lesser extent. Once again, there is an explicit distinction between the level of the law that seeks the absolute good of man («good men») and that relating to a specific political regime («good citizens»), even while the latter always gets built out of the former. What determines the quality of the regime emerging out of this conjugation is the virtuous capacity of whoever enacts the legislation, which depends on the discovery (reason) and the exercise (will) of human virtues and acceptance (faith) and practice (charity) of the theological virtues. Thomas Aquinas' proposal for a perfect social order requires conciliation between the political law associated with a certain regime and the law of universal ethics which is common to all men and which guarantees the good life and happiness and whose full

attainment demands the enlightenment from the grace of the Spirit (political, ethical and religious).

How might we conceive this unity between politics, ethics and religion in determining those values and actions that lead to the good life and to the good man within the dynamic context of secularization that fosters the separation between political power and spiritual power and develops moral autonomy?

6. Political liberalism and axiological neutrality: privatisation of ethical and religious values

The secular dynamics, which encapsulates the separation between political power and religious power, is a democratic value that reflects in the respect for religious freedom (González-Carvajal, 2003, 17). However, secularism and laicism pervert this dynamics when they take root as ideologies, defending that religion should withdraw from the public space and remain confined to the private domain of the conscience. Within the same scope, political liberalism also advocates a privatisation of ethical values and axiological neutrality. According to this theory ethical values must be relegated to the private sphere of conscience and mustn't interfere with political and economic actions.

The Classical Greek philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle, and the Scholastic philosophers, such as Thomas Aquinas, made an effort to introduce ethical criteria into the economic world, for example, with laws over fair prices and prohibitions on usury. During the 16th and 17th centuries, traders and economic actors still paid attention to the reflections of these moralists within the context of a generalised concern over justice. However, from the 18th century onwards, the discourses of economic science and economic ethics began to undergo development in parallel and today economic actors seek out and consult specialists in finance and marketing but they do not consult moralists, and they put forward *Prince* by Machiavelli as essential reading for the directors of great corporations (González-Carvajal, 1998, 75).

Capitalism led to a rupture between economics and ethics, maintaining that economic life is governed by natural laws analogous to

those ruling the physical, chemical and biological domains. Letting everything function in freedom emerges as all that is needed for harmonious development. It no longer makes sense to apply the ethical categories of justice and injustice to an economic movement that is only governed by the technical categories of efficiency and inefficiency, disregarding the moral categories of good and evil. The philosopher Adam Smith, often heralded as the father of liberal capitalism, defends that profit is the drive of economic activities and that, in an invisible way, this dynamism will bring together all of the individual interests in the pursuit of the common good. What happens in practice is that this dynamism has not developed as first foreseen and the economic world has become cruel and implacable, denying the moralists any right to any reflection on economic matters and questions.

Any social order based on striving for a good life requires the deconstruction of the sense of dichotomy and the modern opposition between the public sphere and the private domain in political, economic, ethical and religious terms. If, on the one hand, science, politics, economics and culture have their own particular and autonomous laws as well as specific methods, in which the objective does not involve responding in any ultimate and incorporating way to questions about the origin and meaning of reality and its essence, on the other hand, they assume an origin and a meaning to that essence, which is thematised by the ethical-religious experience and, in this sense, there is also no radical distinction. The objective of all human activity ought to be the common good and so as to ensure this, economy also needs subordinating to ethics through the mediation of political action (González-Carvajal, 1998, 81).

While defining the competences of particular determinations of political organisations and economic activities fall beyond their scope, religion and ethics, on behalf of the common good of the community and human dignity, cannot but take on critical roles in society as well as defining an upstream matrix of values for organising the respective society they belong to and not scaling back their presence to some mere internal and individual sentiment. Clearly, the political power supervising the economy should be a democratic power, elected by the people and subject to control by the Constitution. Equally clearly, not all

of the solidarity ethical demands should be included in planning the active participation of all social powers as this might lead to undermining the incentives for generating wealth and ending up harming the very values that require defending. However, economic activities, which experience tensions between unlimited needs and finite resources, ought to serve man and their purpose of a good, cooperative and fraternal life (social peace).

7. The separation between economic values and moral values

The separation of economic values from moral values was driven by the liberal economic thinking of Adam Smith in his most famous work, published in 1776, entitled *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*, more simply known as *The Wealth of Nations*. In this study, Smith defends that human beings are driven by a natural desire for self-perfection and that, in a free market, despite each individual acting only in accordance with their own interests, this brings about an efficient situation in which everybody benefits: «the natural efforts of each individual to improve their own conditions constitute, whenever allowed to exercise them in freedom and security, such a powerful principle that, alone and without any assistance, is (...) capable of leading society to wealth and prosperity» (Smith, 2014, 63).

This new concept fundamentally challenged traditional moral values, which perceived society as an organisation that sought to attain the happiness not of individuals but rather of the collective as a whole. According to the ideas of Adam Smith, each individual acted in order to maximise their own personal wellbeing and this striving for individual wellbeing led to a positive social wellbeing, therefore, the whole would be greater than the sum of the parts. We would note however that the premises set out by Adam Smith do not extend to considerations about redistribution or social equality, which certainly hinders their association with the concept of public wellbeing.

The ideas of Adam Smith completely changed the meaning of the classical values: generosity happened to be seen as some undesirable value as this undermined the power of the incentives which allowed

individuals to become “efficient” in the accumulation of wealth. According to Smith, «it is not by the goodwill of the butcher, the brewer or the baker that we should expect to dine but rather the consideration that they hold for their own interests» (Smith, 2014, 95). The search for personal profit thus became the drive of economic activity. To give absolute value to private property rights, underpinning the capitalist ideology, led economic actors to give up on concerns around the common good and to dedicate themselves exclusively to their own personal wealth.

Liberal economic thinking, founded by Adam Smith, was adopted on a massive scale by western societies due to the power of its logical and rational arguments. Simultaneously, this economic system enabled political actors “to turn a blind eye on” problems surrounding social justice, so, if an individual lacked the access to their basic needs this resulted from their own laziness and lack of capacity for labour. We would further point to how the rupture with the Aristotelian and Judaeo-Christian values represented a key factor in liberal economic growth and expansion as the revaluing of the accumulation of wealth turned into the idolatry of consumption. Therefore, the exclusive search for individual wellbeing became not only acceptable but even desirable on the pretext that, in overall terms, this would lead to a richer and happier society.

Meanwhile, modern economy only deepened the divide between economic values and moral values: while pre-modern economic theory considered that there was an inherent morality in the economic choices made by individuals, who ought to have common sense and control over their instinctive greed, modern economy abstained from posing any ethical considerations and ambitions over improving on the social wellbeing. The capitalist economic system no longer aims to build a better world for all according to some universal value but rather at the possibility that each individual might attain what is good in whatever way this is presented. As a consequence, many people today are no longer searching for the Good, actually, they want to feel good instead (wellbeing).

The school of neoliberal economic thinking, which today predominates worldwide, does not hold any ambition over building a world in

which man might enjoy a «happy and good life». On the contrary, this strand of thought accepts man as he is and nurtures his individualism, which leads to their indifference towards their peers. In addition to the search for personal gain and profit, this economic dynamism undergoes regulation according to free competition, in which the owner of the means of production holds absolute power over them without the State's interference in their management, and is regulated by the notion that this non-intervention of the public powers does not lead to chaos but rather to harmony because capitalism self-regulates through free market and laws of supply and demand. Obviously, as González-Carvajal highlights, in no part of the world did capitalism take root in any pure format and, after World War II, in the majority of cases, and due to the influence of the British economist John Maynard Keynes, societies have evolved towards a social market economy, following the recognition that capitalism is not self-regulating and is also unable to attain the common good requiring the State intervention for such purpose (González-Carvajal, 1998, 102).

The serious displacement between the economy and the ethics stems not from the idea that companies need to obtain benefits to continue functioning but rather to the concept that their functioning is not for the common good of society but rather to acquire more and more profit. The subordination of the economy to ethics through the mediation of politics should hold the exclusive objective of harmonising the interests of the diverse social groups within the framework of the common good. The political community exists to seek out this common good acting neither mechanically nor despotically but using a moral power based on freedom and on personal responsibility.

In 1987, Amartya Sen theorised on the errors arising out of an economy dissociated from ethics. According to this author, there is a consciously non-ethical character in modern economy, which gave rise to consumer society. This thinker refers to how economy derives from two very different origins, both interrelated with the politics that strives to promote the common good: on the one hand, the question of how to live (interconnected with ethics); on the other hand, that which we may term logistics, which consists in seeking out the appropriate means for the purposes of fostering the good of man. Unfortunately, states

Amartya, modern economy has developed greatly within the scope of this second facet and increasingly overlooking the former in such a way that we witness today a sheer distance between economy and ethics.

Amartya contests the theory of Adam Smith that holds personal interest to be the drive of economy. The former thinker maintains that there is no evidence that the maximisation of personal interest leads to better economic conditions and he gives Japan as an example with its free market economy in which «the systematic deviation of behaviour due to personal interest towards the behaviour based on rules – duty, loyalty and goodwill – have been extremely important to achieving economic efficiency at both individual and group levels, contributing decisively to the industrial success of the country» (Sen, 2012, 13).

8. The separation between the State and moral values

In 1971, John Rawls published his work *A Theory of Justice* and contributed to changing the paradigm of the role of the State in society. Rawls maintained that the state was responsible for guaranteeing that all citizens were free to strive for their ethical values just as so long as they did not interfere with the liberty of the remaining individuals. Did this theory institute the principle of State neutrality and did the State thereby renege social good?

The ideas introduced by Rawls changed the paradigm for states in the western world: beyond the duty of being tolerant and understanding, they were able to hold ethical preferences and foster certain moral values. What took place involved the reform of the function of the State in society, undermining and restricting the moral role of the legislator on the grounds that all values are morally acceptable when they respect the freedom of other individuals. The duty of the state should remain within the boundaries of «guaranteeing conditions of equal religious and moral freedom» (Rawls, 2000, 230). Does this position mean abandoning the ethical demands of the State's civil laws?

We know that representative democracy, perfected with instruments of direct democracy, must rest upon common human dignity. Additionally, given that the state is not confessional, we also know that the

morality of any religion cannot be the ethical instance inspiring and guiding the decisions of civilian legislators. However, we also know that the alternative cannot also be *juridical positivism*, which defends that civil laws do not require any ethical groundings nor can it be *natural law* (natural objective principle) within the scope that laws are only justified through their moral support as external powers for coercion in compliance with some social duties that are imposed in an innate form onto the ethical conscience or that emerge through rational actions. Natural law cannot be accepted as determinant because in practice we realise that, on the one hand, there are different and distinctive conceptions of this very law and, on the other hand, we find that the light of reason does not lead to the same conclusions. Finally, the fact that some specific religion deems itself the legitimate interpreter of natural law also does not get us out of this deadlock (González-Carvajal, 1998, 255). What is the best solution for underpinning political and economic actions of ethical values that defend the principle of the good life and human happiness?

We verify that the evolution of the State from a position of «tolerance» to one of «neutrality» has contributed towards overshadowing the notion of «good life» and common good and created the new religion of society: consumerism. We may add that the neutrality of Rawls opened the door necessary for the legitimation of hedonism. The «good life» therefore lost its place in the definition of social wellbeing to give way to a society in which the needs are numerous and the wants and desires boundless. How do we find a valid response to the problem of ethically justifying civil law in a pluralist society such as our own?

Furthermore, we may observe how neoliberalism advocates the non-intervention of the State in the economy in which there ought to be total freedom for business and commerce that enables economic growth and social development. From the economic point of view, it does not matter whether people are altruists, egoists, hedonists or masochists, the only relevant factor is that they hold certain preferences and follow them. As detailed above, economic theory maintains that economic actors are rational and make their choices in complete harmony with this principle of rationality. What is also certain is that

the vast majority of human choices are not strictly rational even while this facet has been broadly ignored by the intellectual economic community.

Even though some economic models do incorporate the existence of «semi-altruistic actors», i.e., individuals who, in addition to seeking to maximise their own individual wellbeing, also seek to contribute towards the wellbeing of others, the scientific community does not generally accept this idea and, as such, it is not included in many of the models that serve as guidance and support for economic policies. The level of happiness of any society would seem far from ranking as a priority objective to contemporary economic theories.

Ought the State to continue legislating and establishing mechanisms that correspond to the moral values prevailing in the social consensus through religious and cultural sensitivity through civil and penal codes or ought the State to abstain from any moralising action in the name of religious tolerance and cultural and personal freedom?

Ethics, as philosophy of human action, is part of the nature of man and moral questions emerge because we do not live alone: there are other people with whom we interact and who have their own wishes which do not always coincide with our own and who should also be respected. Living within an ethical framework implies considering the finitude of the environmental resources on the planet when we have to decide what to consume in our daily lives. It involves treating the others always as individuals and never as means to achieve anything. It also means to feel responsible not only for our own generation but also for those still to come in the Aristotelian sense that ethics interconnects with the search for the common good, in his referencing that (...) even though there is a single good for each individual in particular and for all in general in a State, it would seem that maintaining the good belonging to the State results in obtaining and conserving a larger and more complete good» (Aristotle, 2004, 20).

Out of the same concern over the correlation between politics, economy and ethics, Amartya Sen defends how «the economy may be more productive should we pay more attention to the ethical considerations that mould human behaviour» (Sen, 2012, 12). Additionally, in the same sense, Gilles Lipovetsky warns as to the individualism of the

hyper-consumerist society in which we live, characterised by unbridled greed, by the consumption of goods that reaches well beyond reasonable levels and by unmeasurable luxury coupled with a significant loss of collective values and the concept of the common good (Lipovetsky, 2015, 11).

Finally, we would reference Luis González-Carvajal for whom the solution for unity between politics and ethics should begin with the recognition of social pluralism in which there are different moral orders such as the Christian, the Liberal and the Marxist but which, despite their own distinctive characteristics, overlap around a fairly broad basic core of values expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (González-Carvajal, 1998, 256). He names this ethical heritage shared by all human groups living in a pluralist society as «civil ethics».

These ethical values shared across the set of citizens enable their peaceful coexistence and should inspire legislation not on the grounds of being the ethics of the majority but rather as a shared platform of understanding that enables dialogue around the moral justifications underpinning the civil laws. However, this shared ethical heritage requires enrichment by the contributions from different religions and philosophies while in the recognition that not every ethical demand is susceptible to conversion into civil laws as such would result in a police state. Citing Thomas Aquinas, this Spanish philosopher affirms that the laws should not ban all vices but rather only the most serious that render coexistence impossible. The remaining ethical demands and requirements should be complied with by citizens without any type of coercion as only thus do they hold any moral value (González-Carvajal, 1998, 257).

9. Conclusion: political governance requires the coincidence of the «good citizen» virtue with that of the «good man»

While distinguishing civic virtue from moral virtue and considering how the virtue of the «good citizen» should belong to all for the citizens' welfare, and admitting that the virtue of the «good man» may

not be common to all, Aristotle concludes that the politician or ruler should be a good and prudent man to act with justice and with the objective of the common good (Aristotle, 1998, 197). From our analysis of the work of Aristotle, we may state that the interpretation attributed to his politics as involving some absolute division between the ethical and political dimensions of human actions represents a distortion of his intent. The purpose of man is happiness but to attain that desire he has to integrate religious, moral and political values which aim at attaining the common good.

Within a similar sense, Saint Thomas Aquinas also defends that the only regime able to make men absolutely good is that in which there is a coincidence between civic virtue and ethical virtue in contrast to those regimes that aiming only at what is useful and delightful, apply laws that only turn men good in a relative way. In a democratic regime, in which all citizens hold responsibilities for the social and political order, the unity between civic virtue and ethical virtue should take place for all so that political and economic actions hold purposes that reach beyond individual interest and contribute towards the common good and the happiness of all.

Within the scope of the materialist society in which we live, there is the generalised opinion that the good and happy life derives from status, fame, power, prestige, money and material goods. The concept of «good life» in Aristotle, which means a life guided by the spirit and moral values, seems to have been lost in the contemporary world, in which the profit focused neoliberal economy has prevailed over all other areas of life. In general, modern economy no longer aspires to do Good and the concept of «good life» was no longer discussed politically and economically because, as Aristotle himself stated, the people who are motivated by personal ambitions of honour and power no longer seem to wish to love, in the community sense, but only wish to be loved in the individual sense (Aristotle, 2004, 191).

As emerges out of contemporary reflection, there is an urgency surrounding the rethinking of the moral demands of economic and political laws, which should adopt a platform for dialogue over the civil ethics based on the consensus established by the Universal Charter of Human Rights and the recognition of the importance of caring for our

shared home, planet Earth. Contemporary society ought to aim at a good life fostering peace, justice and the preservation of the environment.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aquinas, Thomas (2005). *Suma Teológica*. Vol IV. São Paulo: Edições Loyola.
- Aristotle (1998). *Política*. Lisboa: Vega.
- Aristotle (2004). *Ética a Nicómaco*. Lisboa: Quetzal Editores.
- Augustini, Sancti Aureli (1891)., *De Utilitate Credendi Contra Faustum*. Pragae: F. Tempsky. Lipsiae: G.Freytag.
- Carvalho, José (2004). *Problemas e teorias da ética contemporânea*. Porto Alegre: Edipucrs.
- González-Carvajal, Luis (1998). *Entre la utopía y la realidad*. Santander: Editorial Sal Terrae.
- González-Carvajal, Luis (2003). *Cristianismo y secularización*. Santander: Editorial Sal Terrae.
- Jonas, Hans (1995). *El principio de responsabilidad: ensayo de una ética para a civilización tecnológica*. Barcelona: Herder Editorial.
- Lipovetsky, Gilles (2015). *A felicidade paradoxal – ensaio sobre a sociedade do hiperconsumo*. Lisboa: Edições 70.
- Platão (1987). *A República*. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian.
- Rawls, John (2000). *Uma teoria da justiça*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes.
- Sen, Amartya (2012). *Sobre ética e economia*. Coimbra: Almedina.
- Smith, Adam (2014). *A riqueza das nações – volume I*. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian.
- Strauss, Leo (1957). What is Political Philosophy? *The Journal of Politics*. 19 (3), 343-368.
- Strauss, Leo (1988). *What Is Political Philosophy? and Other Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.