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Reception of Plato's *Republic* and his Political Ideas in Polish Philosophy

The main purpose of this paper is to prove that the attitude towards Plato's political ideas among Polish scholars depended on political situation of Poland and Europe.

Before the WWI, when Poland had lost its independence, Plato's project was interpreted as a future perfect state governed by the very well-educated people – the ideal for future Polish democracy. The project presented in the *Republic* seemed to be a perfect aim, not easy to reach, not impossible however. *Republic* was then interpreted as Plato's reaction to the political crisis of Athens and, at the same time, the stress was laid upon reading *Republic* as a remedy for the political crisis which eventually led to the WWI.

At the turn of 19th and 20th centuries, after *Aeterni Patris* (1879) Christian thinkers turned to study ancient philosophy as one of the roots of Christian thought. They attempted to answer the question: who was Plato writing the *Republic*, a communist, a socialist or none of them? This slippery question was essential because its answer determined also the vision of Christian social doctrine.

In the period between the two WW's one may observe the change of the attitude towards Plato's political philosophy. Although the interpreters accented some everlasting values of the *Republic*, they also presented Plato's political philosophy as evolving towards a compromise between the ideal project and reality. It was an expression of the disappointment with the independent country not fulfilling the ideal which was longed for before the war.

The translator of the most of the dialogues into Polish (W. Witwicki, called sometimes "Polish Schleiermacher") worked on the *Republic* during the WWII and right after it. In introduction and commentaries (1948) he described Plato's project as a great monastery, concentration camp, a prison and a totalitarian state. The *Republic* was considered as a project of an escapist thinker, who could not stand Athenian democracy. Witwicki's opinion may be compared to that of Popper. Their inspiration for judging Plato was the same: WW II, though Popper's argumentation was much more detailed. Witwicki however was not acquainted with *Open Society* and probably he did not even know it had been published.

After the WW II, and specially in the Stalinism era, the attitude towards Plato's political philosophy and the *Republic* was ambivalent. On one hand his political ideas were criticized by Marxist philosophers as a naïve, extremely ridiculous project defending the interests of the

aristocracy (the bourgeois class) and hostile to democracy. On the other hand, widely discussed work of K.R.Popper: *Open Society and Its Enemies*, was unable to be translated into Polish, though some attempts were made.

As may be concluded, the above studies are just an episode in the history of Platonism, but they prove the vitality of Plato's political philosophy, which is still worth discussing. These studies are also an example of how the evaluations and interpretations of the past political projects and utopias are influenced by present political situation.