

# THE PROBLEM OF PERSONALITY AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN PLATO'S WORKS

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**Abstract.** In order to understand the essence of a scientific problem better it is useful to follow the sources of its origin and the ways of its development. In our work we try to find the answer to the question how personality and professional identity was understood by the ancient Greek philosopher Plato. The method of the research was the analysis of works both by Plato and by the modern authors writing about him. We may note that Plato did not use the notion „identity”. But his conception of the development of the personality includes the criteria of modern understanding of identity (the time and social aspects). According to Plato, the basis of the personality and professional development of a person is his/her understanding of justice. The principle of justice, in its turn, provides the sustainable development of society.

**Key words:** Plato, personality identity, professional identity, principle of justice, sustainable development

## Introduction

Studying the past we receive the ability to better understand what is happening in the present. There was not a single state in the world where people would not think about the way of preserving the achieved way of life for descendants. The variants could be different: preserving the existing system in the interests of the ruling family, of the privileged elite or of the whole nation (or the peoples inhabiting the state).

The cradle of modern European civilization is Ancient Greece. The outstanding thinkers who lived in Hellas in the Vth—Ist centuries BC offered to the world humanistic, political educational and other conceptions which did not lose their actuality and received their continuation in modern ideas about the world, art and person.

Ancient Greece was not a state in the modern understanding. The people lived in different city-states with their own laws and own interpretation of their history. Subsequently we will come across a similar way of organizing an ethnically single society in Italy and Germany. Numerous city-colonies were located beyond the borders of classical Ancient Greece. It is there where the views on the nature of the world and the person were born. These views promoted the understanding of the psychic peculiarities development of the personality and eventually the personality formation.

Subsequently the centre of philosophical thought moves to Athens. Athens gave Plato and Aristotle to the modern world..

But at the beginning there was Plato. He did not write directly about the problems of sustainable development. But it was Plato who in his works suggested the conception of the development of society and person which envisages the creation of favourable circumstances for the existence of mankind. The central place in this conception belongs to the citizen of the city-state

possessing certain personality and professional qualities. These qualities are formed in the process of specially organized upbringing and education on the basis of inborn peculiarities. All of the above mentioned determined the aim of our work – to find and to concretize in Plato's works the conditions of the personality and professional identity formation as the basis of the person's sustainable development.

The main task of the research is to compare Plato's views upon the person's adequacy (identity) in relation to society with modern views upon the personality and professional identity. The research question which the author of the article intends to answer can be formulated as follows. Was the problem of identity actual for Plato? Maybe, already in the years BC, he using other concepts was trying to understand the conditions lying in the basis of harmonious relations of person and society. In his opinion, these conditions provided the sustainable development of the existing socio-political system.

The only method which allows to find the answer to the above formulated question is the analysis of Plato's texts and the comparison of these texts with the works of other ancient and modern authors.

### **The problem of identity and sustainable development**

The term 'sustainability' and the related to it concept of sustainable development are introduced into the scientific vocabulary in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is considered that Capra (Capra, 1982, 2002) is one of the first to touch upon the problem of sustainability in his works. This term means the provision of conditions of full value for life and personality development within the framework of one generation and preservation of these conditions for the future generations. Sustainable development includes three interrelated constituents: social, economic and ecological ones. The personality of a human being and his/her activity are in the centre of the conception of sustainable development.

The personality of a human being is formed in the process of upbringing and education. Therefore, in the conception of sustainable development serious attention is paid to the forms and content of education orientated towards sustainable development. The issue about the content of such education is being actively discussed nowadays

In the Strategy for education orientated towards sustainable development by the European Economic Commission of the United Nations Organization it is noted that the content of such education should include the formation of the personality's value sphere, of critical (systemic) thinking and the professional choice. At that, the professional choice includes the understanding of

how the personality's professional activity will be connected with the responsibility to society and how it can affect the environment (ANO stratēģija izglītībai ilgtspējīgai attīstībai 2005). It means that the major component of sustainable development is the personality's ability to plan the future proceeding from the analysis of the past and present. (Grabovska, 2006).

All of the above allows to make a conclusion that the sustainable development of society is inseparably connected with the personality development which is also characterized by this quality – sustainability. Sustainability or identity in time is the main characteristic feature of the personality identity. Therefore, the main task of the education orientated towards sustainable development is the ensuring of conditions promoting the formation of personality, social, professional and other identities of the personality. These identities include understanding of the necessity of sustainable development both with the pupil (student) and with the teacher (lecturer). (Salite, Pipere, 2007).

### **The notion of identity and professional identity**

Originally, the notion of identity meant the maximum approximation and fusion of the image and essence of the object or phenomenon with its prototype – idea. In the history of science this point of view was first put forward by Plato.

Subsequently this model of the image and prototype was used in philosophy, sociology and psychology. At that, modern philosophers, as well as other scholars, introduce a somewhat different meaning into the notion of identity. In modern understanding the identity of the personality is connected with the ability to adapt successfully to the contemporary society preserving one's own individuality.

The founders of modern theories of identity are Husserl and Lakan. For Husserl the identity of the personality is, first of all, connected with the inner harmony of the personality. The inner harmony appears when the subject finds the ability to become aware of one's Self or one's real nature. (Гуссерль, 2001). For Lakan the identity means the balance of the outer and inner world of a person (Лакан, 1994). Subsequently these two points of view became the basis of understanding of the personality and social identity of a human being.

Traditionally, the founder of the psychological theory of identity is considered to be Erik Erikson. He notes that:

- the identity is formed in the process of socialization and is the result of separate identifications;
- the identity is manifested as mental constancy;
- the identity is continuous in time (Erikson, 1959, 1963, 1968).

At that, in Erikson's understanding of identity there is no clear border between personality and social identity.

Subsequently, this understanding of identity, or the one close to it, spread to different spheres of life and activity of a person. Nowadays in scientific literature we can come across the mention about corporative, ethnic, gender and other kinds of identity. Among all these new kinds the professional identity occupies a special place. There exists an opinion that professional identity is a special formation which is not connected with other identities.

Identity is one of the fundamental peculiarities of a personality. Consequently, for a better understanding of this phenomenon one should turn to the theories of personality, especially to those which are the most informative in this issue, i.e. to the structural theories of personality. For further preliminary analysis we will choose C.G. Jung's understanding of personality. According to C.G.Jung, there are two important centres in a human being's psyche.

One of them is connected with the person's understanding of what is taking place here and now. This understanding is realized by the personality structure under the name Ego. But Ego as the individual understanding of what is taking place in social life does not always give an opportunity to adapt to what is happening in the personality's social environment. The necessity to live among other people and to acquire social and professional skills lies in the basis of the human being's acquisition of Person.

The personality is the intermediary between one's own inner world and the outer world – social and natural environment. Erikson's conception of identity explains the essence of this intermediation. But the explanation of this essence, in our opinion, can not satisfy a modern person.

Any search for the truth presupposes a historical digression. The modern history of Europe started with Ancient Greece. Two universally recognized geniuses of thought – Plato and Aristotle – lived and created in Ancient Greece. Let us turn to Plato, analyze his thoughts and try to clarify his point of view upon the formation of personality, social and professional identity and upon those peculiarities of a person's development from which benefits both his/her individual life and the well-being of the state where he/she lives.

### **An ideal personality according to Plato**

The understanding of cosmic and human justice lies in the basis of Plato's ideas about an ideal person. In the works of ancient Greek philosophers these ideas were first substantiated by Anaximander and Heraclitus. (Russel, 1964).

Justice includes the understanding and clear division of the notions of good and evil, acceptance and support of the good and non-acceptance of the evil. Plato is familiar with these teachings and follows them. He considers that the notion of justice is not the highest one in the hierarchy of notions with the help of which one can characterize an ideal person representing an ideal state. Justice, according to his views, is a particular manifestation of a more general notion which he calls good.

Plato considers that understanding of the good and the evil is not inherent in all people. It can be inborn. It can be taught to a person organizing the processes of education and upbringing in a special way.

Plato calls the inborn capacity to distinguish the good and the evil *kalokagathya* (from Greek: *Calos* – wonderful, *Agathos* – good). Only few people chosen by the God possess this capacity. These are special people - *dimons* - capable to hear their own inner voice in which the space and the Gods talk. The good is manifested in following the principle of the good. At that, the person can not fully realize the principle of the good during his/her earthly existence as the idea and its concrete realization are different essences. „The good is not existence. It is beyond the existence exceeding it in dignity and power” (Платон, 1998; 317). The good is first of all realized in the ability to be just and to become just.

The stability of the state depends on how well its rulers can follow the principle of the good. Teaching to follow the principle of the good, according to Plato, should take into consideration the peculiarities of the human soul structure. There are three beginnings in a person’s soul: reasonable, unreasonable and the longing ones. The upbringing and education are connected with the development of the reasonable part of the soul and with different limitations of manifestations of its longing part. The development of the reasonable part is based on *sophrosyne* – the ability for the cognition of oneself and other people, for evaluating your actions and social phenomena according to what is good and what is evil. *Sophrosyne* is also manifested as decency and tranquility of the soul and the body, modesty of the soul and doing „one’s own deeds”.(Платон, 1986).

In „The State” Plato writes about four kinds of the good (divine virtue): wisdom, courage, prudence and justice. In „Laws”, one of the thinker’s last works, he writes about different kinds of the good: health, beauty, corporal power and wealth (Платон, 1998). In the first case, the author seems to concentrate his attention on a person’s spiritual perfection while in the second case he focuses on the bodily perfection as the soul and the body are inseparably connected. This connection in Plato’s works constitutes the basis of the conception of a modern person’s

upbringing. This conception includes two most important elements: gymnastics (harmonization of the body) and moysicos arts (harmonization of the soul).

As E. Temnov, the researcher of Plato's works notes, in „The State” wisdom reveals the foundations of all moral deeds, while in „Laws” the priority is given to prudence restraining the human deeds within the limits of moderation (Темнов, 1998).

### **Relations between the personality and the state.**

In his works Plato follows the principle of cosmic justice. As we have noted above, the principle of cosmic justice is transformed into the principle of divine virtue. Cosmic justice is the manifestation of this virtue. But cosmic justice has different levels of its manifestation where the higher levels (the God, the state) subordinate to them lower levels – society, political parties, the person's individuality.

Plato follows the principle that the state is primary. But the stability of the state and its foundations depends on every citizen.

These are the citizens who are capable either to support or to destroy the foundations of the state. According to Plato, an ideal state (which means a sustainable state) should be ruled by people who received the upbringing of an ideal person and who possess kalokagathya. He calls them guards. Guards do not have a family or personal possessions. Those who have stood the test of temptation in their youth can become guards. They possess a philosophical way of thinking. Real (contemporary to Plato) states do not comply with the criteria of an ideal state therefore they are not sustainable. Real states do not differ in the principles of selection of their rulers but in the ways of power distribution and in the attitude of the rulers to those thinking differently. In the real state, be it an aristocratic, tyranic or democratic state, already in the second generation there begin to appear people dissatisfied with the existing order. Their identity is not formed under the influence of the purposeful education and upbringing. Here the main role is played by the processes of spontaneous social teaching. The number of such people increases with the time. Eventually it leads to changing one social formation by another. (Платон, 1998).

### **Personality and professional identity in Plato's understanding**

Identity is, first of all, a social category. Identity means that a person is socially mature. He/she has got life plans, he/she is able to take responsibility for his/her actions and sees the connection of his/her actions with the progressive development of society and with the solution of his/her existential problems.

All of the above mentioned, refers to understanding the positive identity. There are other kinds of identity which were analysed in the works of Erikson's follower Marcia. (Марсиа, 1967).

Identity is the continuous self-identity ( Burns, 1982). The time criterion within which the person stays loyal to himself/herself and to his/her ideals not contradicting his/her social environment is fundamental in the identity conceptions.

The time characteristics of identity is important for Plato as well. But unlike modern conceptions of identity, for him neither personality time nor historic time are fundamental for self-realization of the ideal person. In his conception of a person, time which can be called mythological is fundamental. It goes back into endless past since people possessing kalokagathya start their origin from higher Gods. Thus, in particular, Persia's tsars originate from Zeus. Lacedaemon tsars are the descendants of Zeus. (Платон, 1986: 538).

On the other side, identity is connected with the endless future, as the person's soul is immortal and the spiritual health of succeeding generations depends on his/her earthly deeds. Thus, Plato introduces eugenic substantiation into the understanding of identity. This substantiation in its obvious or hidden way is presented in Plato's conceptions of a person's finding of his/her personality identity. For people securing the sustainability of the state, identity is connected to sophrosyne. For those destroying the state, identity is connected with the uncontrolled social influences actualizing the longing part of the soul. Only sophrosyne harmonizes a personality and it promotes a person's striving for prudence.

Sophrosyne as a way to the ideal identity does not envisage the development of the individual. Moreover, the closer people approach this ideal the fewer individual variations must be revealed in their behaviour and ways of reacting to the events taking place in the socium.

Individuality, according to Plato, can take place only within the framework of professional identity, as everyone should do his/her own work and should not interfere into what others do within their competence. At that, professional identity secured by sophrosyne is realized in ruling the state and in reflections about the essence of life. But if personality identity is formed on the basis of spontaneous social influences then professional identity connected with it can only be revealed in the degree of mastery within the limits of a certain trade .

## **Conclusions.**

1. Plato in his works does not use the notions „personality identity” and „professional identity”.

But taking into consideration the fact that identity is connected with the peculiarities of a

person's self-realization in the society where he lives (and in his works Plato writes about this) we can speak about his conceptions of personality and professional identity.

2. For Plato an ideal personality identity exists in the endless mythological time. A person in his/her earthly time can influence the subsequent generations and the peculiarities of their identity by his/her behaviour. The ideal identity within the lifetime is connected both with hereditary factors (kalokagathya) and with the peculiarities of mutual influences of biological and social factors of a person's development – sophrosyne. Sustainable identity of these people determines the sustainability of the social system in which they live.
3. The identity of the person existing only within the framework of his/her personality time is formed under the influence of uncontrolled social influences. The identity formed in this way does not facilitate the sustainability of social systems.
4. A person's individuality can be successfully developed only within the framework of professional identity.

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