

**THE EXOPOLITICS OF PLATO & ARISTOTLE:  
BETWEEN  
ISOLATIONISM & INTERVENTIONISM**

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## Introduction

It is often said that the micropolitical tradition of social philosophy began with the Greeks. Indeed, the etymological definition of politics, as public affairs --res publica-- of the polis, made the two concepts synonymous.

It is also claimed that the reason Greek thinkers spoke so little about macropolitics was that they were unaware of the significance of interstate relations in their world. Yet, their emphasis could indicate that they were mainly concerned in the endopolitics of the city-state and considered exopolitics beyond the purview of political philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps, philosophers did not consider questions of macropolitics important because the ultimate aims of foreign policy were not moot theoretically. The primordial Greek dichotomy of human activities within either physis or polis, relegated foreign affairs to the chaos of the former, while only civilized praxis was worthy of inclusion into the latter.

Another Greek dichotomy was between interpolitical and international relations. The former took place among city-states and were to be conducted according to the common law of Greece. The latter, between Greeks and barbarians, were more akin to the law of the jungle.

Since international relations were classified in the realm of natural necessity, examining the desirability of unalterable facts was irrelevant or impertinent. Relegated beyond the pale of rational inquiry, external affairs were left to the natural wilderness, so political thought focused on perfecting the internal life of the polis.

The few outstanding exceptions to this proclivity were historians, like Herodotos and Thucydides, or orators, like Isocrates and Demosthenes. Unlike them, bona fide philosophers as Plato and Aristotle believed that since Greek culture was the highest form of civilization, all others were merely anthropological curiosities, hence unworthy of serious attention. Consequently, the responsibility for this bias has been squarely placed in the lap of these philosophers.

It is quite ironic that the original critic of this ethnocentric preoccupation was Aristotle, who first deplored the philosophical overemphasis on endopolitics. Such concentration in internal affairs, he declared, was unrealistic because domestic and foreign aspects were inextricably interrelated. Thus to ignore exopolitics would invalidate any complete analysis of a state.<sup>2</sup>

It is even more ironic that the main target of Aristotle's criticism was none other than Plato. This Aristotelian polemic has proven quite controversial, because Plato did pay some attention to foreign affairs, and Aristotle himself can hardly be said to have done any better on the very subject he accused his mentor of ignoring. All this seems to indicate that the inadequate coverage of exopolitics was not an oversight due to incompetence or indifference, but a conscious consignment of this topic to a lower level of theoretical significance.<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, our philosophers did not overlook foreign policy altogether, as their commentators did throughout history. Although such neglect may have been excusable in the past, it is no longer so because globalization has now thrust international affairs at the top of our political agenda. So, in order to correct such anachronistic omission, this short study will try to fill that gaping lacuna by exposing and explaining the salient points of Platonic and Aristotelian thought on exopolitics.

Our contention is that both philosophers conceded that their ideal state had to have some external relations; provided wise statesmanship could regulate them properly by a strict foreign policy and strong diplomacy. A good government then had to decide how to treat its neighbors by determining and enforcing its rights and duties towards them (AP, 1265, 1325a).<sup>4</sup>

This study focuses on the state dilemma in opting between the Scylla of isolation and the Charybdis of intervention; which means forcing an exchange between political sovereignty and

economic prosperity. To resolve this painful dilemma, our thesis combines Platonic idealism and Aristotelian realism to form a foreign policy of moderation and toleration. The ideal state recognizes the need of external affairs, but also their danger. As a double edge sword, exopolitics must therefore be prudently conducted and strictly controlled. That is the message of Plato and Aristotle that we carry and argue here.

The final question is whether ancient wisdom has anything to offer on this critical subject. Can the ideas of Plato and Aristotle help modern states in their search for better foreign policies? Do ancient concepts of politics and economics, nationalism and militarism, colonialism and imperialism, apply to the modern world? Our study should provide some pertinent answers to these perennial questions in the three following chapters dealing with: self-government and self-sufficiency; defense and alliance policies; as well as imperial and colonial affairs of their city-states and by extension our nation-states.<sup>5</sup>

### **1-Autarchia & Autarkeia**

Living at a time of instability and conflict, the philosophers viewed exopolitics in a rather unfavorable light. Interstate politics were for them associated with force and violence; hence the less there was of them the better. For this reason, they constructed their states in such a way as to operate with a minimum of external intercourse. A common characteristic of Plato and Aristotle then is their introversion; so, although their states are not completely isolated, they have their backs turned to the world.

Plato was convinced that contact between states creates friction and conflict because diversities and differences that cause wars come to play when states interact. The obvious solution then is a minimization of foreign affairs, if not a regression to a golden age of the past when states lived in blissful ignorance of each other (PL, 625-9).

Although Aristotle was quite critical of Plato's isolationism, he concurred that self-sufficiency and self-government could only be safeguarded by a minimalist foreign policy. Thus, most of the activities of a state must take place within its boundaries, so that external affairs -*exoterikon praxeon* - do not become important or indispensable. Yet, he concluded that even if self-sufficiency were possible, isolation was not. The state, like the individual, could not be content as an isolated utopia - *monotein...atopon*. (AP, 1265-7; 1325ab; EN, 1097b, 1169b).

#### Relations

Contrary to their legend, both philosophers realized the practical impossibility of complete isolation. Agreeing with Herodotos (I, 32) that no land is an island, even Plato admitted the need for some foreign relations (PR, 370e-371a). Since one cannot escape from his place and time, the rational thing to do is to make the best of one's location and situation.

From this initial acceptance of foreign relations as a lesser evil, the philosophers soon came to see some desirability in exopolitics. Making a virtue of necessity, they found certain good points in external affairs and tried to promote them. In his later years, Plato conceded that complete seclusion was rather uncivilized and boorish, so his state not only had a duty to participate in interstate affairs but go further to cooperate in intergovernmental organizations (PL, 949).

For these reasons, both philosophers would have no problem with states being involved in international relations and intergovernmental organizations, as long as they could maintain their sovereignty. Giving part of their highly valued independence or self-government was then only justified as a *force majeure* dictated by environmental necessity.

## Regulations:

Although it is neither possible nor desirable for a state to be completely isolated, it is both possible and desirable for exopolitics to be strictly controlled. For that reason, international relations should be mainly intergovernmental. This means that state officials should be the ones who come in contact with outsiders, thus protecting private citizens from possible foreign contamination (PL, 950). Only well-regulated relations with the outside world could be of advantage to the ideal state (Theages, 126c); anything else could bring chaos and ruin.

Above all, a regulated foreign policy means state control over the movement of people and goods across borders. For this purpose, a good polis had to have firm laws in the fields of immigration, tourism, and trade (PL, 949e). Plato reasoned that because foreign travel introduces new ideas and ways of life, it destabilizes domestic customs and laws. Hence, unrestricted international traffic destroys the coherence and solidarity of a community. So in open societies where everyone is allowed to come and go as he pleases, we would expect to find confusing rules and traditions.

## Immigration:

In most states of course, such confusion is a way of life with which people learned to cope by various compromises, as was the case when immigrants are allowed into a country (PS, 293d). But such compromises were neither necessary nor desirable for Plato, since any policy of unrestricted immigration would destroy his political constitution (PL, 736c; 950a).

Aristotle agreed that immigration was a dangerous thing because it pitted newcomers against those already established, thus creating tensions and frictions between them.<sup>6</sup> However he did not think that a mixed population is necessarily bad, so he took exception to Plato's comments in the Laws (704d-5b), in which the argument was that any demographic mixture is detrimental to good government. One must also look at the other side of the coin and consider the possibility that a certain degree of multiculturalism may be advantageous to all parties, citizens and foreigners alike (AP, 1327a).

Accepting the classical division between Greeks and barbarians, the philosophers distinguished a Greek mixture of different tribes or cities from one of barbarians. The former was far from ideal, but less objectionable than the latter, since the degree of cultural separation was considered as directly proportional to social frictions and conflicts.

Multiculturalism, of course, has become a syndrome of modernity, especially in the new world where countries of immigrants predominate. Nevertheless, a similar distinction is implicitly made between foreigners of the same race or culture and those from more exotic ones. This is particularly so in homogeneous societies, where foreign residents are much more controversial. Even in the highly mobile world of today then immigration is rigorously controlled by all states for the same reasons or fears that Plato and to a lesser extent Aristotle voiced.

## Travel:

Although Plato was adamant in forbidding immigration, he did allow foreigners to visit his state for a short time. "We are not so snobbish as to keep out all foreigners. Such extremes are arbitrary and unduly severe, so we should not adopt them," said Plato. Furthermore "our dealings with foreigners, both at home and abroad, should not be churlish, but courteous and hospitable, in respect to Xenios Zeus." (PL, 950b-52d).

The philosophers believed implicitly in the ancient custom of amity as a sacred duty (D.L, III, 81) and so applied it equally to states as well as individuals. The only restriction placed upon foreign

visitors was that they require entry visas. Once these are accorded, they would be considered as state guests and treated according to a strict protocol commensurate with their purpose and rank (PL, 845).

As such, they would be classified into four categories:

- foreign diplomats on official business to be accorded full state honors;
- foreign scholars or academics on special field research to be given the information they want and allowed to go anywhere they please;
- merchants who come to trade goods and services necessary to the state to be received as friends and allowed to carry out business unhindered;
- private tourists visiting games or spectacles to be watched at all times and restricted in their movement or contact with citizens (PL, 952d-3e).

Of course, modern states would have no problem with the first three categories, since contemporary international travel takes place according to these policies. Where Platonic policy and present practice diverge is in the matter of private tourists, where these two points of view are worlds apart. Obviously, Plato's tourist guide reminds us of those in defunct totalitarian states and few remaining xenophobic ones. So, our present liberal Weltanschauung completely rejects such outdated travel advisory.

Trade:

Moving on from people to products, Plato and Aristotle continued their carefully circumscribed policies. Having admitted that economic self-sufficiency, *autarkeia*, is practically impossible (PR, 370e; EN, 1097b), the philosophers had to allow entry of some foreign products, along with their byproducts. These imports were precisely what Plato feared most: not trade per se, but its undesirable syndromes, the most detestable of which were excessive consumption and inequitable distribution of wealth.

It was understood that trade results from surpluses, generating profits for some and losses for others. Those who do not do so well in this competitive race, find an opportunity to increase taxes in order to build large armies and bureaucracies with an insatiable appetite for further growth to keep up with their rivals. Not only does this power and prestige race make for expansive or destructive wars; but even when it is directed towards peaceful and constructive activities, it builds grandiose monuments and organizes expensive festivals which occupy and impress people, instead of fulfilling their real needs (AP, 1313)

Being convinced that commerce brought conflict, corruption and demoralization, Plato sought to insulate his economy as much as possible from the deleterious effects of international capital (PL, 704-5). This he tried to do by instituting strict controls on foreign trade, particularly during critical or war times when, though imports were allowed, exports of strategic materials were expressly forbidden (PL, 847-9).

Basically, the government had to supervise a two-way flow of imports and exports to maintain a balance of payments. To pay for the imports, one must produce a surplus of something to exchange as exports (PR, 370e) and the best way to control such trade is price-fixing rather than duty-imposing (PL, 847b). In that sense Plato maybe considered a free-trade advocate. The paradox is that he wanted to abolish custom duties to restrict trade rather than expand it, being confident that such methods plus the complete interdict on private citizens to engage in commercial activities would suffice to curb trade to the absolute minimum.<sup>7</sup>

On the contrary, Aristotle did not accept such minimum, as long as trade was under control. Since a flourishing commerce properly managed could be a means of improving the standard of living of a community, he could not understand why Plato was making all that fuss about the corrupting influence of foreign trade. Merchants, he countered, play a vital role in the life of a state. That is why, after all it is

not for the sake of foreigners but for its own citizens that a country engages in commerce: emporike (AP, 1326-7).

To maximize its commercial advantage, a good government should find out what others have to offer and what they need in return. Having done so, commercial treaties can be concluded with those who have complimentary needs to be fulfilled in mutual benefit (AR, 1359b).

Since trade must be paid either by hard convertible currency or primitive straight barter (AP, 1257a), a good statesman must know how much he could afford to spend and what to spend it on. He has to know his domestic production and consumption, so he can calculate the net surplus or deficit remaining for export or import. In short, a statesman has to know how to be on good terms with those whom his state is economically interdependent (AR, 1360).

Evidently, Plato's trade restrictions are closer to modern mercantilism than to liberalism. They are consistent with the totalitarian character of the ideal polis and its strict code of political control of all socioeconomic activities. Since the state controls all foreign relations, international commerce is a state monopoly, so there is no question of "free trade" in a Platonic world.<sup>8</sup>

Although this aspect of Plato has been rapidly outmoded in our increasingly interdependent world, Aristotle, as usual, is more realistic and modernistic. His ideal controls imposed on foreign trade are not that much more rigid than the actual policies of many countries then and now. The Aristotelian trade proposals, therefore, may be comparatively useful in confirming present policies.

In either case, the main point of Plato and Aristotle is that a state cannot have both political independence and economic dependence. These two values are inversely correlated: as one increases, the other decreases. When political borders become porous, so that the movement of goods or people becomes free for all, it means that states have lost control of these important functions of sovereignty.

It should be evident by now that this is exactly what is happening in our own times. Nation-states now, as city-states then, are squeezed from below by internal dissension and above by external globalization. The philosophers recognize this contradiction and propose the only way for the state to safeguard its sovereignty, if that is what we want. Otherwise, we could continue our march to economic globalization in full understanding of its political costs.

## **2- Amina & Symmachia**

Plato and Aristotle's problem in creating a new ideal state in the midst of many old real ones made for some formidable defense problems. A revolutionary state with a different ideology and constitution than its neighbors is bound to cause resentment and disturbances to its environment. Out of these differences would result at least frictions or disputes and at worst conflicts or wars. So as much as the philosophers abhorred violence in theory, they had to admit its probability in practice.

Consequently, so long as a virtuous state was in the midst of vicious ones, its leaders had to be familiar with the evil arts of war. Even if one hated its harmful effects, war had to be accepted as a regrettable fact of life. Under the circumstances, pacifism was not a realistic option to ensure the existence even of a peaceful state (PR, 373a; PL, 803d).

Those who are not willing or able to meet force with force, no matter how good they may be in other respects, end up the slaves of the first bully who happens to pick on them. Thus the best way to keep one's freedom is to be eternally vigilant and the best way to avoid war is to prepare for it: *si vis pacem, para bellum*. Besides, complete peace can make men lazy and insolent, whereas a little conflict forces them to be just and temperate (AP, 1331a, 1334a).

## Defense:

Since the philosophers were trying to build a revolutionary society, they expected certain fear and threat from reactionary ones. The external hostile environment then would force the ideal state-planners to adopt draconian measures and insulate their society behind an "iron curtain." After a wise domestic policy then, the central preoccupation of its statesman would have to be a prudent foreign and strong defense policy.

Eventually, this fear of external and internal enemies, made Plato's polis so security-conscious as to resemble a "garrison-state." This growing preoccupation for defense is evident from the elite military class of the Republic (422) to the total citizenship-in-arms in the Laws (795; 813-4; 831-3).

Because of this excessive preparedness of for war (PR, 373a; PL, 626a), Plato has been accused of aggressiveness towards neighboring states and especially foreign nations. This however is a far-fetched inference, taken out of context and does not hold up to the overall Platonic ideals of peaceful coexistence.

## Just War:

Assuming the inevitability of conflict, the philosophers tried to set down the conditions under which war could be properly waged. This difficult question of when to take up arms legitimately, has since become known as the problem of "just war". After studying the issue at length, Plato concluded that national defense, pro patria tuitione, is the best justification of war, whereas unprovoked aggression is its worst pretext. Aristotle agreed that war is a necessary evil which good states are forced to resort in when threatened with enslavement or extinction.

Although a state must always be prepared to respond in case of attack, it should refrain from initiating it. As Xenophon said (Poroi, 5.13): of course, a state should defend itself against aggression, but it is much better to avoid war in the first place by not provoking others to attack it.

In any case, war not only must be just but appear to be just and carried out according to the laws of war, otherwise it will deteriorate into savage slaughter. Thus, in order to be legal, war must be duly debated, decided, declared and executed by the sovereign authority of states.<sup>9</sup>

Above and beyond self-defense, Plato thought war was acceptable for reasons of liberation or reconciliation, redress of wrongs, punishment of wrongdoers, reparations for injuries, helping friends in need and opposing injustice (PR, 471b). Accordingly, one could go to war if he were the undeserved victim of deceit, violence or spoliation (Alcibiades, 109ab).

Aristotle also justified war in cases of self-defense, helping friends, preempting an enemy, reattributing an injustice, acquiring slaves, benefiting hegemony, preventing a wrong and even carrying out natural selection as a last resort. On the contrary, it was not justified in cases of unjust cause or low morale, unwillingness or inability, disunity or disloyalty and finally mutual destruction (AA, 1425, 1446). Based on this wide leeway, a state could find sufficient reasons for casus belli, not only for those directly concerned but for anyone else. Every state then has a duty to uphold justice everywhere, otherwise it deserves to be attacked (PL, ix, 17)

From these extensive lists of prescriptive and proscriptive causes of war, it would seem that a state would never be hard-pressed to justify any policy it wanted. Taking the philosophers as its authority, a state that really wished to go to war could easily find one of these pretexts quite suitable to legitimize its actions. The only real reason for not going to war would be unwillingness or inability to do so. One is therefore puzzled that such indefinite and inclusive justifications could have been accepted, admired and reiterated by later thinkers for two millennia.<sup>10</sup>

The most plausible explanation of such platitudinous taxonomy of just causes for war is that it was merely a compilation all the arguments pro and con, rather than a reflection of philosophical conviction. It would indeed be very naive to think that Plato and Aristotle did not realize the uselessness of any exhaustive listing of just war, without a suprapolitical authority to judge each case.

Moreover, it is evident from other statements that they were by no means so permissive in their policies whose overall picture is one of caution and restraint to avoid any kind of war, justified or not. Thus, by specifying all these cases for just war, Plato and Aristotle may have sought to limit violence to the minimum consistent with justice and security.

Alliances:

An important point in which Plato and Aristotle agreed is that a state must not try to avoid war by complete isolation or seclusion. A model state ought to cultivate friends or allies and cooperate with others in promoting peace and justice in the outside world. Although permanent entangling alliances were to be avoided, the principle of collective defense in times of crisis was accepted as superior to independent action.

So much did Plato believe in the value of good allies that he advised statesmen to base defense policy on steadfast and incorruptible friends, rather than economic power or military strength (PE, vi). Therefore, a good polis must be ever ready, not only to defend itself, but help its friends in distress (PL, 737d; Grotius, II, xxv, 7).

Plato and Aristotle did not mind if sometimes one had to ally with unworthy states. Ideological or constitutional differences do not have to hinder international understanding. Since a reformed state most likely coexisted among unreformed ones, it had to play the diplomatic game according to their rules. But they did mind as to the choice of allies on the basis of ethnicity. It would be treason for states of the same nationality to ally with foreigners in order to fight each other (PR, 422d; AR, 1396a).

Plato devised an ingenious way to defend his state against aggression by dividing its enemies through an enticement of material rewards. Since the Platonic state had no money of its own, it was proposed to send to any prospective allies the following message: "We do not possess gold or silver because these metals are illegal in our state; but if you want to have them, ally with us - sumpolemesantes - and you can keep all the spoils of any war we fight together." Plato thought that this laconic proposition with its generous terms would ensure his state plenty of allies anytime it wanted them (PR, 422d).

Aristotle as usual was less ingenious but more rigorous than Plato, so he distinguished military from political systems. An alliance --*symmachia*-- is a union of sovereign states for the purpose of increasing their military power in order to make war or defend themselves against a common aggressor (AP, 1261, 1280). Apart from ensuring that the parties to it follow common rules, alliances neither care how each member state is governed nor how good and just it is. Therefore, since an alliance does not have a common authority to care for the common good, it is not a polity and can never become one.<sup>11</sup>

As alliances result from formal treaties and exist so long as they serve the mutual interests of their parties, states should enter into alliances if they cannot defend themselves alone, if their foes are much stronger or if they can prevent war (AA, 1424b). On the contrary, they should not join or withdraw from an alliance that does not serve any purpose, it is too far away or its members have a bad reputation (AA, 1447a).

In conclusion, it was pointed out that as instruments of power, alliances must be chosen very carefully, lest they prove to be liabilities rather than assets. Only if they combine the advantages of power, proximity and benevolence, could they strengthen a state's security; if not they might be more dangerous than facing enemies alone (AA, 1446b).



From *Plato to Nato*, states have always tried to improve their power politics by military alliances. The philosophical musings selective and collective defense then ring quite familiar and could apply to the modern as well as to the ancient world. As internally idealistic a polis may be, it is quite realistic in its external security; so has little to learn from our long subsequent history.

On the contrary, our debt to Plato and Aristotle is that the main security of a state does not rest so much in military weapons or powerful alliances, as in a strong community spirit and citizen solidarity. The best defense therefore is not material arms but political arts.

### **3-Apoikia & Hegemonia**

Combining foreign economic and diplomatic policy is a state's attitude or action by direct incursion in the domestic affairs of other states through colonial or imperial policies. By distinguishing between these two conditions --apoikia & hegemonia--, however, the philosophers accepted one and rejected the other.

The crucial difference was that colonialism is a way of relieving a country's excess population by sending emigrants abroad to metastasize in a new polis; whereas imperialism imposes the rule of one state over others. Plato and Aristotle concurred that although it was preferable to avoid both, the former was acceptable whereas the latter was intolerable.

#### Colonialism

If possible and necessary, a state could send out periodically any accumulated surplus of its population to establish new colonies abroad in order to maintain demographic stability (PS, 293d). Plato thus agreed with Isocrates that this traditional policy was a way to relieve pressure in an underdeveloped and overpopulated country by settling new lands (PL, 740).

The people sent off should be of low class who may cause trouble when the food supplies are not sufficient for everyone. The best way to deal with such hungry masses is to persuade them to leave (PL, 707-8). This method can also work to get rid of undesirables, revolutionaries and dissidents in general (AP, 1306). Bluntly speaking, all these activities, if they are successful are euphemistically called "colonization" (PL, 735).

For that reason, one of the main functions of the statesman is to establish colonies --apoikias-- as well as deal with expatriates -exothēn politas. Thus, not only can colonialism alleviate many domestic problems but also solve some international problems, because one of the main causes of war is friction among too many states coexisting within too small space (PS, 293de).

Resettling the excess population in some available land elsewhere could alleviate this congestion. If colonists were wise enough to leave a sufficient area between themselves and others, friction would be minimized and border disputes avoided altogether. Both Plato and Aristotle then recognized this geopolitical principle and specified the location for their states to be a sparsely inhabited terra nullius (PL, 950a; AP, 1273, 1320).

As is well known to political theorists, the best way to establish a utopia is to set up a new colony, so Plato and Aristotle considered this method both in theory and practice, since they were personally involved in many schemes to establish colonies in spacious and isolated lands.<sup>12</sup>

To be properly established, of a colony had to be well prepared in advance, especially if it were to be settled by many ethnic groups. In this case, a team of experts should make a comparative study of the laws of various nations and select the best of them for the new polis (PL, 702c, 708a).

As customary, it was taken for granted that the colony would be independent from its inception, so the metropolis could not interfere in the domestic affairs of its colonies. Any kind of subordination that kept a new settlement under the control of an old one was therefore out of the question. The only legitimate link between them was created by certain special bonds in the form of treaties ensuring their lasting friendship and cooperation (PL, 754).

### Imperialism:

The philosophers were, of course, well acquainted with the concept of *machstaat*. The basic premise of imperialism: that power over others was a natural law of international affairs, was well known to them. But by comparing imperialism in international affairs to despotism in domestic politics, they were emphatic in their condemnation of any such policy of arbitrary domination.<sup>13</sup>

It would be difficult to find more bitter irony in Plato than when he describes the authoritarian personality embodied in an imperialist whose dreams of grandeur include conquest of the whole world and often heavens to boot. Unfortunately, such personalities foster that imperialism, like any policy using force to get its way, is destructive not only to those who suffer it but also to those who impose it. So, Plato insisted that even if we expect some conflict and war in this imperfect world, we should point out to the powerful that they refrain from unrestrained use of violence because it is unworthy and unfair to force one's will upon others (PL, 627a).

We can find many examples both in mythology and history where well-governed states with excellent constitutions were ruined because they espoused the fatal doctrine of imperialism. So as a classic aristocrat, Plato concluded that well-governed states cannot possibly be empires.<sup>14</sup>

Aristotle concurred that imperialism eventually brings about the downfall of great states and so argued against the apologists of imperialism who tried to justify it as a road to world peace. Since the rule of one over another is *per se* illegitimate, a law-abiding state could not possibly rule an empire. Something that is acquired illegally could not be ruled legally. "*Imperium et libertas*" then cannot coexist, one would ultimately corrupt the other (AP, 1333b).

Aristotle admitted that the urge to exploit and dominate was rooted in human nature, therefore many thinkers consider imperialism as a natural phenomenon. This analogy between men and states, however does not hold, because imperialism is a political institution based on economic inequality and social tradition --ethos-- not a natural instinct of superior ruling inferior.

Like Thucydides (1, 76.2; 4, 61.5), Aristotle recognized that some people are natural leaders and others, followers. Consequently, he sadly concluded, imperialism is as much the fault of those who accept to be dominated --*kratoumenous*-- as of those who take advantage to rule --*archein*-- them (AP, 1296a).

Aristotle went on to emphasize that only those who deserve to be free have a right to enjoy freedom. Consequently, a superior state could use force to subjugate nations who were by nature inferior. In these cases, war, as hunting or fishing, was a legitimate way for free men to treat beasts and slaves (AP, 1325a, 1333b).

As Plato also said, nature decrees that it is right for good to prevail over bad and strong over weak. The truth of this axiom was shown both in the interanimal and in international realm, so it is right for the higher to enforce their rule upon the lower nations. (Gorgias, 483).

Aristotle of course realized that the maxim “superior should rule inferior” was not always the case in natural law. Often, those who actually ruled were worse than their subjects, in that case their dominion could not be regarded as legitimate (AP, 1256b).

The only justification for one state ruling another is when such domination is for the mutual benefit of both parties and especially the weaker one. A proper imperial policy could be exercised upon those who had to be governed by others as a trusteeship for their own good (AP, 1333b). Whereas imperialism among equals then is inexcusable, between unequals it is commendable. Having thus condemned brute imperialism as a doctrine and rejected it as a policy, the philosophers reiterated their complete faith in the sovereign independent state.<sup>15</sup>

## **Conclusion**

If the external relations of an ideal state are neither interference nor interdependence, expansion or domination, what are they? (PL, 962-3). What is the best foreign policy for a model polis? To these questions, both philosophers would undoubtedly answer: neighborly peaceful coexistence.

As such, Plato and Aristotle can be placed somewhere in the middle of the isolationist-interventionist continuum. Since they recognized different macropolitical situations, ranging from the hostile and conflictive to the amicable and cooperative; they responded by flexible circumstantial policies, grounded upon stable general principles.

Our foreign policy, said Plato, is not aggressive or bellicose but pacific and amicable (PL, 640b). The objective of the ideal polis, which is internal excellence, requires external peace and order to be realized, because war is detrimental to good government (PL, 628b). Thus the wise statesman must work to promote harmony in foreign affairs, as he labors to preserve justice in domestic politics (PL, 701d).

Peace should not be confused with passivity or stagnation, added Aristotle. Neither is it simply a cease-fire or armistice. Rather it is a resolution of conflict, whereas armistice is only a respite from war (AR, 1411b). Peace is thus the context in which justice is the content.

Yet peace does not mean the absence of all conflict. Peaceful rivalry and competition is therefore welcome as a healthy interaction among states and individuals alike. Just as men, states should compete with each other for excellence, Plato affirmed, being certain that his ideal polis would have no trouble winning first place (Alcibiades, I,124b).

As much the philosophers hated violence and cherished a peaceful life, they realized that as long as states were imperfect, war would often break out. The existence of independent states, each pursuing different courses of action, was bound to produce some violent clashes. The realistic statesman, then, must expect and prepare for the periodic cycle of war and peace, making the best in each case. This is possible by minimizing the former and maximizing the latter, always trying to fit immediate war policies in the ultimate attainment of peace.<sup>16</sup>

Everyone agrees, said Aristotle quoting Alcidas, that war is the source of most evil, while peace is the condition of most good (AR,1397a); so only perverts or insanes would choose war over peace. When sane people engage in violence and slaughter, they do it in order to attain some peace and harmony; for it is human nature to prefer to live among friends than among foes. War then can only be justified as a means to peace, just as work is good because it leads to rest (EN, 1177b). Men engage in war, as they do in business, only as a means to an end. The ultimate end of all these enterprises is always the same: mental tranquility and physical leisure (AP, 1333a).

Thus, in the international, as in the national realm, eirene is the aim of plemos and the only goal of domestic or foreign policy. The ideal polis would then stand equally among the other states of the

world, interacting and cooperating but at the same time towering above and beyond them, a model for everyone to behold and adopt.<sup>17</sup>

Evidently, these ideals are just as pertinent now as they were then. So as general and platitudinous they may be, they form the fundamental of policy principles through the millennia. Most philosophers since then would subscribe to these norms as universal and eternal aims of state conduct.

Accepting the desirability of such values as security and amity, or tranquility and prosperity, the problem has always been the possibility of their implementation under particular circumstances. Here Plato and Aristotle tried to decrease the probability of interstate frictions and conflicts by minimizing external relations and global interdependence.

To do so, they had to maximize a state's self-reliance by increasing its individuality and autonomy, even to the point of self-sufficiency and semi-isolation. Since the road to internal perfection is external seclusion, the ideal state had to aim for a subsistence economy, solitary polity and contained society.

Obviously, such policy proposals are completely out of tune with contemporary trends. Even if they could be implemented then, they are almost impossible now with globalization holding sway throughout the world. Under the circumstances, what can the Greek thinkers tell us?

In a word: caution. "Be careful how fast and far you go in this globalizing frenzy." In their exopolitical ideas, Plato and Aristotle were out of step even in their own increasingly interdependent times, let alone with ours. But that is exactly why humanity needs philosophers: to warn us against what is fashionable and taken for granted. By heeding their caveat, we should therefore slow down the rush to globalization, in the same way as we should avoid any single-minded or short-sighted extreme.

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#### Notes:

1. For a detailed study of classical Greek theories of foreign affairs, see this author's recent book on Exopolitics, from which this article has been extracted.
2. Aristotle's criticism of Plato's exopolitics is found in *Politics*, II, vi, 7-8; II, vii,14; IV, iv,10-1; VII, vi; VII, xi. More specifically, this indictment occurs in *Politics* (1265a, 1267a), where Aristotle claims that in the *Laws* (704a-708c) Plato did not take into account external affairs (Jones,143; Herz,119).
3. Plato did discuss foreign affairs in the *Laws* (737cd), so for a long time the accusation of Aristotle was considered a result of inaccurate reading of Plato (Cf. Susemihl's elaborate critical edition of the *Politics*, 1879). But since Aristotle was hardly a careless student of Plato, the most plausible explanation is that he had an earlier version of the *Laws* that did not include these passages. (Morrow,145, 156, 162; Sabine, 126).
4. Classical works will hereafter be referred as follows: Aristotle: *Athineon Politea* (AA); *Politics* (AP); *Rhetoric* (AR); *Eudemian Ethics* (EE). Plato: *Epistles* (PE); *Laws* (PL); *Republic* (PR); *Statesman* (PS).
5. For details on the ideal polis see: Barker,198, 300-1; Gouldner, 209, 237; Levinson, 567; Kohn,104; Morrow,184, 202.

6. A good example here is Sybaris, where the Achaeans became more numerous than the Troezenians and expelled them from the city. After the destruction of Sybaris, they themselves became refugees and were expelled from other places. Similarly, immigrants in Amphipolis caused many revolts and fought with the landed gentry there (AP, 1303a; 1306a).
7. The philosophers assumed that no self-respecting citizen would soil his hands with such lowly business (PR, 371a; PL, 742; 849). Yet, historically, there is no evidence that the average Greek had any contempt for manual work, let alone commerce. (Jones, 11; Knorringa, 23, 82, 103-5, 126; Jarde, 254; Morrow, 139; Zimmern, 244, 324).
8. Yet, there is hardly any mention of state monopolies in Greek literature. The only exception is Aristotle's example of Egypt (AP, 1325a).
9. The problem of war is treated more humanely in the Laws than in the Republic. In the latter (PL, 823-4), Plato likened war to hunting, meaning that it may be good or bad, depending on how and why it is waged: i.e. according to rules and for defensive purposes. This must be one of Plato's final thoughts on the topic of war, as it occurs in the last book of the Laws (Grotius, I,iii.4; II,i.2).
10. Aristotle's influence on this point began with Cicero and the Roman lawyers and continued through Augustine to Dante and Aquinas. All of them looked to war as the means to peace. See also Allendy, 147; Despotopoulos, 33; Freeman; Jarde, 246
11. This differentiation in the Politics (1280ab), is similar to that of Tonnies between Gesellschaft and Gemeinschaft. The former is a society based on conscious calculation of interest by social contract; whereas the latter is a community arising out of psychological empathy, rather than physiological interdependence (see also Gress, 50-95).
12. For Plato's involvement in the Sicilian colonies see: Epistles, III, 319c; VII, 336a. For Aristotle's in Asia Minor, cf. On the Colonies (Rose Frg, 658).
13. Plato denounced the imperialism of Athens and Sparta, while Aristotle denounced that of Macedonia. PL, 625, 742; AP, I, ii, 8; III, ix, 14; EE, I, ix, 8. (Cf. Drews; Livingston, 93; Martin, 95).
14. Plato's hate of imperialism may be a reason for his reluctance to generalize about empires. It may also explain why he did not finish the myth of the Critias. (Hammond, 161; Webster, 90).
15. For Aristotle's ideas on imperialism, see Rose, Frg. 82 of his treatise On Justice. Also Morrow, 98; Ferguson, 112; Russell, 70; Barker, 288, 422; Ross, 268).
16. For details see: PR, 469bc, 470, 471a, 510, 515, 567; PL, 623, 628, 803; Laches, 191. Similarly, Socrates, according to Xenophon, D, IV, 14, could not blame states for going to war out of necessity (cf. Stone & Craig).
17. For a detailed analysis of Plato's and Aristotle's ideas on war and peace, see this author's article in the Annals of the Academy of Athens: Vol 27-8 (1997-8), pp. 142-152.

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