

To Plato for a Teaching on Justice and Dignity

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Abstract: To Plato for a Teaching on Justice and Dignity.

Marek Piechowiak's book *Plato's Conception of Justice and the Question of Human Dignity* is the first comprehensive study of Plato's conception of justice. It shows that Plato already referred to something we today call "dignity" and made it the foundation of his conception of justice. In Piechowiak's interpretation Plato is far from any form of totalitarianism, he praises human freedom, he cherishes the visible universe and the concrete human being. Justice is shown to be crucial for understanding the individual and his relationship with the state and law. This book proves that Plato's philosophy is strikingly contemporary and may provide foundations for modern-day human rights protection.

Keywords: Plato, Justice, Dignity, Goodness, Virtues.

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1. Introductory remarks: topic and methodology

Marek Piechowiak's book *Plato's Conception of Justice and the Question of Human Dignity*, now in its second edition (revised and extended, Peter Lang Verlag, Berlin, 2021, pp. 302), is the first comprehensive study of Plato's conception of justice. It is an extremely interesting, captivating and important publication as well as a most awaited one, since the issue of justice – central to Plato's philosophy – has not yet been thoroughly examined in a monographic work. Marek Piechowiak fills this significant gap with great competence, passion, clarity and in an illuminating style.

The book, originally published in 2019, has quickly become a bestseller, achieving wide recognition. And it is not without reason. The study offers a new, compelling interpretation of Plato's thought while at the same time revealing the beauty, adequacy and contemporariness of his philosophy. Marek Piechowiak presents Plato as someone who helps us better understand the human being in the modern world and find one's own answers to the crucial questions on how to be a good man, how to live a supremely happy life. The book contains deep

considerations about such weighty matters as: dignity, justice, virtues, goodness, equality, friendship, love, happiness, the aims of law and state, punishment. It proves that Plato's thought is strikingly contemporary and congruent with the foundations of modern-day legal orders. In Piechowiak's interpretation Plato is far from any form of totalitarianism or even paternalism, he recognizes something we today call "dignity", he acknowledges and praises human freedom, he cherishes the visible universe and the concrete, visible human being. It is a totally different Plato from the one depicted by Karl Popper or the one we used to know from schools or handbooks of the history of philosophy.

The book contains interesting references to modern-day legal orders and documents (such as e.g. the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, basic laws and constitutions of selected national legal orders) as well as to ancient Greek culture and other philosophical schools, ideas, thoughts (the Pre-Socratics, the Sophists, Socrates, Aristotle, the Stoics, Aquinas, Kant etc.). However, as the author stresses, the main and primary perspective from which Plato is read is that of contemporary legal orders and not the perspective of the philosophy of law itself. Marek Piechowiak adopts the standpoint of the "user" of Plato's philosophy, which enables him to include Plato in the contemporary debate on the most important issues and to verify the correctness of his philosophy. It is a very good perspective as it helps to better understand the European philosophical tradition of thought about the individual in law and state and the human being in the contemporary world. Philosophy is treated here as it should be – not as a mere collection of other people's thoughts but as a tool for understanding reality.

2. The author

The book shows Marek Piechowiak's great interest in Plato as well as his vast knowledge and skills in the fields of philosophy, law and ancient Greek culture. The author combines these three domains in a beautiful way and with all the necessary competences. He habilitated in philosophy and is a professor of legal sciences, currently working in the SWPS University Law School in Poland. He has published extensively on legal philosophy, ethics, constitutional law and the foundations of international and constitutional protection of human rights. He held seminars and wrote widely on Plato. This book is the fruit of many years of his research. It will certainly be one of his most important and prominent works, next to his monographs on the philosophy of human rights (*Filozofia praw człowieka. Prawa człowieka w świetle ich międzynarodowej ochrony*, Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, Lublin, 1999) and on the common good as the foundation of the Polish constitutional order (*Dobro wspólne jako fundament polskiego porządku konstytucyjnego*, Biuro Trybunału Konstytucyjnego, Warszawa, 2012).

3. The structure

The structure of the book is very clear, well-planned and coherent with the dignitarian approach of interpreting Plato adopted by the author. Marek Piechowiak starts from the foundations and then goes to more complex issues. He discovers – in spite of commonly held views – that Plato recognizes the individual human being as an end in itself and that laws and the state have only instrumental value – they serve as means to benefit the individual (to make him more just), to achieve friendship and happiness of the citizens. Therefore, before considering the questions of the justice of law and state, of the aims of laws and reasons for building a political community, the author deals with the issues concerning the individual – the questions of dignity and justice (justice of the soul and of actions). In the final two chapters he examines some particular issues relating to justice to present how the conception works and to test his interpretation (on a “hard case” of the sharing of wives as presented in the *Republic*).

4. The content

The first analytic chapter of the book (chapter 2) is devoted to Plato’s reflection on dignity found in the *Timaeus*, in particular its passage with the Demiurge’s speech (41a-d). Marek Piechowiak notices that Plato already recognized something we today call “dignity” – a quality that positively and radically distinguishes certain creatures from other beings and provides a reason for treating these creatures in a special, privileged way – as ends in themselves, never merely as means. Moreover, as the book proves, Plato, unlike modern legal approaches which often limit their interest to the question of what dignity is like, gives an answer to the question of what dignity is. Of course, Marek Piechowiak is fully aware that Plato had neither the modern concept of dignity nor the word which could provide a translation of the “dignity” as it is used nowadays in the domain of law. Nevertheless, he shows that Plato talks about a reality designated by “dignity”, about a reality which has characteristics ascribed to dignity in the modern legal systems. Similarly, in Piechowiak’s view, regardless of whether Plato has at his disposal terms which directly refer to what we call “existence” today (in other words: whether Plato uses *einai* [*εἶναι*] in an existential function or not, as Charles Kahn argues¹) he provides – mostly using the language of unity – insight into an existential aspect of reality. Referring to the relevant passages from the *Republic* about the Good as the highest idea and to Plato’s unwritten teachings on the Good as the One (the Form of the Unity), the author notes that in Plato’s approach unity is the basis of existence. The

¹ C. Kahn, *Essays on Being*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009, pp. 202, 62-74.

Good is the cause of “existence and being”² of things in a way that it grants them unity, determines them, makes them distinct from other beings. What has no unity does not exist – it breaks down and ceases to exist. Giving unity is first of all a matter of existence, of giving or strengthening existence. According to Plato, this inner unity of things is based on internal harmony and order of the elements – that is on beauty.

Taking it all together and following Plato’s considerations Marek Piechowiak defines dignity as a special, exceptionally perfect way of existence based on an exceptionally “strong” inner unity which is constituted by a special, exceptionally perfect inner harmony and order. Being a unity, dignity becomes a manner of existence and therefore encompasses the given entity as a whole – and thus all of its traits. What is decisive here is not the “content” of the elements which are bound together, but the inner integrity of the being itself. Dignity is radically inherent (inseparable) and independent of any particular quality or manner in which a being actually acts (rational, free etc.). Piechowiak notes that such an approach is totally congruent with the contemporary recognition of dignity as a source of all human rights and of their integrity. It may also provide a general ontological framework for further explanation of why human rights protect not only traits specific to human beings (such as being free and rational) but also all other aspects of being a human. As the study proves, Plato sees dignity as universal, inherent and inalienable, which is compatible with the provisions of the modern-day legal instruments. Marek Piechowiak explains what these characteristics actually mean. He quotes Plato’s Demiurge, who describes the inner constitution of creatures composed directly by him as “well fitted together and in fine condition”³. The Demiurge, who provides the inner unity of a being, is good, he is the best of causes. Therefore, he can never want to destroy someone who has been beautifully harmonised and is in fine condition because “only one who is evil would consent to the undoing”⁴ of such a creature. The Demiurge will always want its existence because of its inner unity, harmony (dignity) and because He himself is good. Piechowiak argues that according to Plato since everything which is composed is not immortal in itself, it must be the will of the Demiurge and the special harmony (dignity) of the soul which are the only reasons for the immortality of the soul. It refers to every soul, even to the soul which is radically corrupted by leading an unjust life – there is no death penalty for the souls. Therefore, as the author points out, in Plato’s approach dignity is universal in a radical way – it has always been and will always be present where there is a human being. It is inherent and inalienable, because no human being can exist without dignity. Losing it would mean the loss of existence and dismemberment of the parts, which would necessarily involve destruction of the human soul, destruction of its special inner harmony and order – which cannot be

² Plato, *Republic*, 509b, in Id., *Plato. Complete Works*, J.M. Cooper, Indianapolis – Cambridge 1997.

³ Plato, *Timaeus*, 41b, in Id., *Plato. Complete Works*, cit.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

the case for the reasons mentioned above. Dignity cannot be lost either by any action of its bearer or by any action of other people. It is independent of the circumstances of one's life, one's moral stances, one's particular traits. Therefore, as Piechowiak notes, it is equally "possessed" by men and women, slaves and free men. The development of every human being is equally important and should be taken into account by everyone⁵. In Piechowiak's interpretation Plato's approach again proves to be surprisingly modern.

Furthermore, the book explains and justifies the postulate to treat dignity bearers as ends in themselves. The Demiurge wants the creature to exist (to live constantly, without an end) not because of its belonging to a certain kind of species (something general) but because of its specific inner harmony and beauty (something particular) – for its own sake. The creature therefore is an end in itself and not a mere instrumental good. The author explains that to treat someone as an end means to care about their flourishing and the accomplishment of their aims, to provide existence (life). That is exactly what the Demiurge does.

The book proves that dignity is not a vague concept or a legal fiction. It can be explored, described and justified, which is what Marek Piechowiak does. His in-depth analyses provide an invaluable help in understanding dignity as an axiological foundation of law, as a source of rights and obligations. They are also of great significance for the comprehension of the overall Platonic project and the European tradition of thought. As the author rightly remarks, Plato's reflection on dignity cannot be treated as marginal. On the contrary, it should be regarded as fundamental to the whole of Plato's theory of justice and generally to the whole of his philosophy.

The middle part of the book treats directly of justice (chapters 3-6). The author distinguishes three primary contexts in which justice is considered by Plato: justice as a virtue (justice of the soul – chapter 3), the justice of actions (chapter 4) and the justice of the state and laws, which also includes punitive justice (chapter 5). The issues of equality and friendship, which are directly involved in Plato's understanding of justice, especially the justice of laws and the state, are considered separately (chapter 6).

In chapter 3 Marek Piechowiak begins the quest for justice. He refers primarily to the *Republic* and identifies two topics in Plato's considerations of justice as a virtue: justice in the model of the hypothetical state and what justice in truth is. First, he reconstructs Plato's argumentation on justice in the hypothetical state, which leads to the statements – widely accepted as genuine Platonic views – that justice consists in "doing one's own work"⁶, that everyone should be occupied with only one job, and that a few wise persons should organize in detail the life of all members of the political community for the benefit of the state. Then the author examines the limitations on applying these conclusions to the issue of justice as

⁵ Also by the master in relation to his slaves. See Plato, *Laws*, 777d-e, in Id., *Plato. Complete Works*, cit.

⁶ Plato, *Republic*, 433a, in Id., *Plato. Complete Works*, cit.

such. He argues that the postulate of devoting one's entire life to one occupation for the benefit of the state is held by Plato to be only a phantom of justice. The story about the model of the state is not to be read as a political project for an ideal state – rather it should be read as a story about the individual and his soul, only. Piechowiak claims that constructing a model of the state is entirely subordinated to answering the question of how to be good, how to be just. He is carrying out an interesting, in-depth analysis of the passage from Book IV about what justice is in truth, of the meaning of the model of the state as *εἴδωλον* – a phantom of justice (*Republic*, 443b-e). His interpretation of this passage is supported by the analyses of virtues, of Plato's teaching about the discourses designed for the acquisition of knowledge from the *Phaedrus*; the description of justice as the health of the soul from the *Gorgias*; the versatility of the just man (contemplating the truth which is a foundation of wisdom is by far insufficient for being happy), as well as to Plato's statements about the instrumental character of the law and state (e.g. *Laws*, 743c), the overall aims of Plato's philosophy as well as the ancient Greek tradition regarding virtues. There are also other compelling arguments against the interpretation of the model of the state as Plato's political project for an ideal state which are presented in the relevant chapters of the book.

Before clarifying the issue of justice as a virtue the author makes some interesting introductory remarks. He explores the basic intuitions in the Greek language and culture relating to justice and law. He delves into the etymology of such terms as: *dike* – *δίκη* (from which the word *dikaiosine* – *δικαιοσύνη* – justice is derived), *nomos* – *νόμος* (law), *daimon* – *δαίμων* (a deity, god or spiritual semi-divine being inferior to the gods). He points to the link between justice and happiness. The references to the *Gorgias* and the *Republic* prove that justice is regarded by Plato as the most important of all matters. The *Republic* is considered as the dialogue on the individual and the model of the state presented there is treated as the model of man (the human soul). The author focuses on Plato's tripartite theory of the soul as an answer to the question of what it means to be good. Because the goodness of the whole presupposes the goodness of each part, it is necessary for the soul to be good that each of its parts possessed a perfection specific to it (virtue). However, a fourth excellence is also needed – the one responsible for the perfection of the whole soul – and this is justice.

The author first examines the three virtues that belong to the essential aspect of the soul: wisdom, courage and moderation. After that he considers justice, which is the perfection of the whole soul in its existential aspect and which presupposes the mastery of the three previous virtues. The author's detailed investigation leads to deep reflections on the condition of the human being. Wisdom (the perfection of the rational part of the soul) is a kind of knowledge which oversees just actions. It is practical, moral knowledge about how a man as a whole would best deal with himself and other people. It indicates univocally what should be avoided, not what should be done. As Piechowiak notes, this has important consequences for the very possibility of finding out what precisely an individual should do in a given situation to fulfil himself. If only the boundaries of acting justly can be cognitively specified,

it is possible that there is more than one good way of acting. Thus in order to determine how to act justly, not only knowledge but also a decision on the form of action is required. Moreover, wisdom is acquired by a given individual himself. It is not something learned from someone else. As the author notes referring to the myth of the cave, education does not consist in “putting” knowledge into one’s mind, but in turning the learning power in the right direction (towards the invisible realm), in enabling the soul to learn what is important.

The discussion of Plato’s conception of courage yields very intriguing results. The book shows that Plato understands it in a way that differs from its common understanding as a virtue typical of soldiers. Plato defines courage as the power to preserve one’s own, rationally acquired convictions regarding what should be avoided. Courage proves itself in the face of strong emotions – not only fear and pain (as on the battlefield), but also – and equally – desires and pleasures. The knowledge to which an acting subject should be faithful indicates only specific actions which should not be performed (which are forbidden), and not specific actions that should be done. Referring to the *Apology*, Piechowiak links this knowledge with conscience, which according to Plato “whenever speaks it turns me away from something I am about to do, but it never encourages me to do anything”⁷. This knowledge, represented by the personal *daimon* (the guardian spirit), is not the same for all, but is crafted for one’s chosen way of life. Piechowiak develops this thread later when he writes about the freedom to shape one’s own life in the chapter on the justice of law and state. The above mentioned considerations have far-reaching consequences for the interpretation of Plato’s dialogues. They provide strong arguments against assigning to Plato the totalitarian view that the state should control every aspect of the life of the ruled. It turns out that in Plato’s view it is simply impossible for any ruler to know of what exactly a good (happy) life of the ruled consists. Piechowiak also notices a striking resemblance between Plato’s views and the basic convictions underlying modern human rights protection - that the general conditions of organizing a just society are objectively founded, and that there is space for a free determination of concrete social orders and for free determination of individual lifestyles.

Considerations about moderation show that it is a virtue spreading throughout the whole soul. It is not a perfection solely of the appetitive part, as was accepted in the later ancient tradition. The book proves that Plato does not advocate suppressing desires but wants to appoint them to play their role in relations to the other parts and to the whole of the human being. Emotions should not set the aims although they are helpful in achieving the goals determined by reason. Moderation is a kind of concord, harmony of the parts of the soul concerning which part is to rule, determining the objectives of actions, and which parts are to execute actions. The author notices that since reason is the part which ought to rule, moderation is

⁷ Plato, *Apology*, 31d, in Id., *Plato. Complete Works*, cit.

more closely related to that what in Latin tradition is called “prudence” than to “temperance”.

Finally, the book provides a clear and thorough explanation of the fourth and most important virtue – justice. Being the existential perfection of the whole soul, it is based on increasing the unity (harmony, order, integrity) of its three parts – the rational, the spirited and the appetitive. This unity is built up by an acting subject. It is an addition and enhancement to the original unity (the original strength of existence based on inherent dignity). Justice, being the overall moral perfection, is understood as an existential excellence: the more one is just, the more – more strongly – one exists. Someone who has mastered justice practices all the cardinal virtues. Piechowiak pays close attention to the versatility of the just man and makes some interesting references to the virtue of magnanimity. He compares Plato’s approach to Aristotle’s view on justice as well.

Justice of actions is carefully examined in chapter 4. As the author notes, happiness derives not from justice of the soul, from the inner unity in itself, but from acting justly. However, being just is a necessary condition for acting justly – a person acts justly because he is just (good). The question of how to determine the content of just actions is explored through a detailed analysis of the *Gorgias* (in particular its passage with Socrates’ dialogue with himself – *Gorgias*, 505e-507c), which is read in light of the myth of the cave from *the Republic* and Plato’s teaching on the Good. The author’s interpretative skills as well as his profound knowledge of Plato’s works come to the fore here. The exploration leads to the conclusion that justice of actions lies in the benefit of others. Those deeds are just which are in accordance with the nature of the addressee of the action – those which are appropriate and fitting to the addressee. As the author points out, this appropriateness of actions is measured by their contribution to the inner unity and therefore to the strength of existence (the justice) of the addressee. Just deeds are characterized negatively – by a version of the harm principle: “it is never just to harm anyone”⁸ (even enemies) – and positively – as actions aimed at the advantage of their addressees.

Marek Piechowiak notices that Plato’s conception of justice enables to explain something which at first glance seems paradoxical. Since justice is the good of another, then the acting subject has to lose something that becomes the good of another. How is it possible that the doer of just actions becomes good himself? The author finds Plato’s answer on an existential level: although acting justly involves the loss of something which belongs to the acting subject (possessions, time, health, sometimes even one’s own life), nonetheless, someone who acts justly gains a kind of advantage: one *has* less but *is* more. He benefits himself in his first and most excellent perfection: in his existence. Just actions contribute to the justice which is in the soul and which, as inner harmony, establishes an inner unity of the soul that is the foundation of existence.

⁸ Plato, *Republic*, 335e, in Id., *Plato. Complete Works*, cit.

Chapter 4 also contains an interesting analysis of the myth of the cave. The myth is considered as a passage about education, functioning within the framework of a quest for comprehending justice. Coming out of the cave (and coming back to it) is not a venture for an afterlife but takes place in this world. The author emphasizes that knowledge about the Good in itself is necessary to understand justice and moral development as a whole. Knowledge about that which is invisible enables one to comprehend why justice is about the benefit of another, why justice never harms anybody and why practicing justice is the best thing of all that a human being can do. The conclusion about the priority of acting justly over contemplating truth is confirmed by Plato's teaching about the Good. As Piechowiak notes, unlike Aristotle's first mover, Plato's Form of the Good is not focused on getting to know himself but, by his very nature, creates and cares for that which has been created. A human being striving for goodness (justice) participates in this undertaking.

The justice of law and the state is examined in chapter 5. As the study shows, this issue is secondary to Plato's understanding of the individual as a being endowed with dignity. Plato's writings indicate the priority of the individual over the state. The quotation from the *Laws*, which is the leitmotif of the book, makes it clear: "The whole point of our legislation was to allow the citizens to live supremely happy lives in the greatest possible mutual friendship"⁹. It is argued that laws and the state have their moral dimension, their aims. The justice of law and state should be judged according to two important criteria – their contribution to the goodness (justice) of the individuals and their just deeds, which are the foundation of their happiness, and to the intensity of friendship between them (which also presupposes equality).

Chapter 5 presents powerful arguments against Plato's alleged totalitarianism. Piechowiak conclusively proves that Plato – recognising individuals as ends in themselves and subordinating law and the state to the happiness and friendship of citizens – evidently supplies no foundations for totalitarianism in any form. The author refutes Isaiah Berlin's serious argument directed not only against Plato's conception of justice but also against the whole tradition in which the objective foundations of justice are recognized. Finally, the question of freedom to shape one's own life – in both aspects of short-term and long-term life planning – is analysed. Piechowiak presents a beautiful interpretation of the myth of Er considering it as the story about human life in the here and now, about the choice of a way of life.

The in-depth examination of punitive justice in chapter 5 explains the crucial philosophical issues related to punishment. A punishment is understood as a kind of medication for the soul of the punished. In rare cases, when no improvement is possible, it is beneficial as a deterrent. The primary end of punitive justice is to make human souls better, and not to benefit the state or any legal order.

⁹ Plato, *Laws*, 743c, in Id., *Plato. Complete Works*, cit.

Considerations in this respect turn out to be very compelling and coherent with the dignitarian perspective of the modern legal orders.

Chapter 6 is devoted to equality and friendship – two issues directly related to Plato’s conception of justice. It contains interesting elaborations on equality in dignity, arithmetic equality and geometric (proportionate) equality as a foundation of true justice. Marek Piechowiak shows how Plato, using the language of mathematics – mostly the concept of geometric proportion – points to unity as a fundamental ontological issue concerning justice. A crucial role is played by just action, which binds the acting subject with the addressee of his action and thus the community is created. The author makes an important remark: in Plato’s conception increasing just actions leads not only to the growth of justice in souls, which increases happiness, but it also strengthens bonds between members of the community and therefore friendship is, alongside happiness, the main aim of law (according to Aristotle and in the successive tradition, friendship, although playing an important role in the society, loses its preeminent position as an explicitly set aim of law).

As the author shows referring to the *Laws*, Plato’s perfect state – the one that should be strived for – is a state composed of individuals who are equal in virtues, who, by participating in ruling, help each other to improve, to develop in a comprehensive way. Interesting enough, Plato anticipates the principle of subsidiarity – the state should create the conditions for people’s helping one another and not act as a substitute for the members of the community, otherwise the very foundations of friendship would be undermined. The perfect community is based on wisdom, which can only be acquired through dialogue and friendship. Piechowiak interprets Plato’s entire political thought in the light of *Letter VII* where Plato strongly opposes the use of violence or force in introducing the right political order or in persuading others to act justly/not to act unjustly (*Letter VII*, 331b-d). Plato teaches his readers to deliberate in a community with others on political and legal issues in the here and now which at first glance – having in mind the depiction of this philosopher in textbooks – sounds very surprising, nevertheless strikingly coincides with the Socratic attitude. Social arrangements which contribute to happy life of the members of the political community vary in time and space. However, according to Plato there are some constant prerequisites for any political system and any law which claim to be just. These include a striving for cardinal virtues and the recognition of everyone as being an end in oneself. Such an approach resembles to a great extent the contemporary model of deliberative democracy with dignity as the axiological foundation of law. It also runs counter to almost all that is taught at school regarding Plato’s political thought.

In the final chapter 7 Marek Piechowiak examines how the presented conception of justice “works”. He argues that in Plato’s approach the best thing a human being can do is to act justly and not to engage only in pure contemplation. He also challenges Vlastos’ view by proving that the proper objects of love are other people and not abstract forms. Last but not least, the author tests his interpretation on a “hard case” – the passage from the *Republic* about the sharing

of wives. Analysis of this excerpt in a non-totalitarian framework seems to be a very difficult task, as the author himself admits. Yet he succeeds in this undertaking by providing a new, coherent interpretation of this controversial passage. He points to Plato's own suggestions in the text which indicate that the story about the community of wives is meant not only as an exercise in gaining wisdom but also as a test for courage and moderation for the listeners of Plato's Socrates and the readers of the *Republic*. The very idea of the sharing of wives is interpreted as a temptation that should be rejected by the courageous listeners of Plato's Socrates.

5. The overall evaluation and recommendations

The reviewed monograph is a truly beautiful and a most educational book. It treats of "matters on which it is most honorable to have knowledge and most disgraceful to lack it"¹⁰ – that is of what makes people happy – and this is justice (goodness). Following Plato, Marek Piechowiak reveals the reality of paramount importance for living "supremely happy lives in the greatest possible mutual friendship"¹¹. The author leads the reader to different "places" where he can see what is important for becoming good and acting in a good way and enables him to write within himself "the living and breathing discourse concerning what is just, noble and good"¹². This book – apart from being an excellent guide to Plato's conception of justice and to his philosophy in general – encourages and helps the reader to think alongside Plato about the (social) reality itself, about one's own attitude towards himself and other human beings. It explains the issues of dignity, justice and the other cardinal virtues. It gives important guidelines on how to determine the content of just actions, build a successful community, achieve friendship and happiness.

The book is also beautiful – in its content, form and overall structure. The author begins his quest for justice with an analysis of the Demiurge's speech in the *Timaeus* and ends it with the praise of the visible universe which concludes the same dialogue. He is consistent in following his dignitarian approach of reading Plato. He offers an adequate, coherent and clear interpretation of Plato's thought. His arguments, extensively supported by the analyses of source texts, often radically challenge prominent, commonly accepted views. Well-known passages, like the myth of the cave, are read in a new, illuminative way. Some expressions which are quoted in textbooks as representative statements of Plato's views (like "doing one's own work" - treated as a definition of justice) prove to expose only phantoms (sometimes useful) of the reality Plato is talking about. Some passages which are rarely taken into account, like Plato's Socrates' statements on what in truth justice is (*Republic*, 443c-e), turn out to be crucial. Piechowiak also makes

¹⁰ Plato, *Gorgias*, 472c, in Id., *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, III, Cambridge, Mass., London: William Heinemann 1967 (The Perseus Project).

¹¹ Plato, *Laws*, 743c, in Id., *Plato. Complete Works*, cit.

¹² Plato, *Phaedrus*, 276a, in Id., *Plato. Complete Works*, cit.

interesting legal, philosophical, etymological, cultural references which shed light on the difficult issues. The book is well-structured and written in a clear, comprehensible language and style. It reads very well. It is worth noticing that the book contains not only a general index, but also a carefully developed *index locorum* which will help anybody interested in the interpretation of the particular passages of Plato's works.

Marek Piechowiak achieves the objectives set at the beginning of his book. He gives a comprehensive exposition of Plato's conception of justice as seen from the perspective of human dignity. He proves that Plato already referred to something we today call dignity and made it the foundation of his conception of justice. Plato's conception turns out to be congruent with the foundations of modern-day legal orders. The most significant question Plato aims to answer concerns how to be a good (just) man, how to lead a good life. The issue of both justice and dignity is concerned with the inner unity and placed on an existential level. Ontology and epistemology are subordinated to practical issues. Justice is shown to be crucial for understanding the relationship between an individual and the state and the law, for understanding the aims of laws and how and why to build a political community.

The book contains considerations of great importance and invaluable benefit for lawyers, philosophers, political scientists, politicians, theologians, other academics, teachers. Lawyers may find the in-depth analyses of dignity, justice, punitive justice, justice of law and the state, equality, friendship particularly useful. Philosophers will be confronted with the new, compelling interpretation of Plato's thought that challenges commonly accepted views. At any rate, the book, being written on the most important of all matters, in a clear, comprehensible style, is strongly recommended for anybody seeking knowledge about justice.