

Directorate (U) and FEGOCTA Online Lectures for B.A.

Unit 1: Plato: State, Justice, Education, Communism and Philosopher King Paper 2: Western Political Thought B.A. Second Semester: Political Science

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Introduction

Plato (428-348 B.C.) was a Greek political philosopher. His major works concerning political philosophy are: the *Republic*, *the Statements and Laws*. According to him the question “what is best life is inseparable from the question “what is the best order or organization of human society”. He established an Academy which became the first seat of higher learning and intellectual pursuit in Greece for the next one hundred year. The Academy admitted women.

His method of writing is dialectic. This method was initiated by his mentor Socrates. He used the question and answer method to arrive into a higher understanding of a problem.

Plato’s Ideal State

“Until philosophers are kings or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and the power of philosophy and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, cities will never rest from their evils” (Plato)

Plato built his ideal state on the analogy of an individual organism. He believed that the virtues of an individual and of the state were identical. He was of the view that an individual presented almost the same features and qualities on a smaller scale as society on a bigger scale.

Parts of an organism	What it symbolizes	Its counter symbol in State
Belly	Appetite or desire	Laborers, agriculturists, industrialists, clerks, businessmen
Heart	Courage or Spirit	Soldiers and military officers
Brain	Reason or knowledge	Philosophers, thinkers and rulers

Features of an Ideal State

1.Rule of the Philosophy

Plato was of the view that in an ideal state the philosopher-ruler should be prominent. He should has a broaden vision of unity of knowledge. Philosopher-kings are immune from the provisions of law and public opinion.

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2.No Unqualified Absolutism

Though, neither, there is any restraint of law nor of public opinion over philosopher-rulers but that is not an unqualified absolutism. It is not all despotism, because rule of philosophy is not free from the basic articles of the Constitution.

3.Control over the education system

Philosopher ruler should control the education system in an ideal state.

4.Justice in Ideal State

Justice is the main feature of Plato's Republic and it is also present in his ideal state. Justice is the bond which binds every member of society together. It forms a harmonious union of individuals.

5.Censorship of art and literature

In ideal state, there should be a complete censorship of art and literature. It is necessary so that nothing immoral things might falls into the hands of the young individuals.

6.System of Communism

Plato was of the view that guardian class should live under the system of communism of property and family. The rulers and soldiers do not possess any property of their own.

7.Equality among men and women

According to Plato, equal opportunities should be given to both men and women for their economic, social, intellectual and political uplift. We can say that Plato was the first feminist of his time.

8.Principle of Functional Specialization

Plato was of the view that due to multiple wants, an individual could not fulfill all his desires by himself alone due to lack of capacity. Thus co-operation among individuals should be necessary to satisfy their mutual desires. Some people are specialized in performing some certain tasks.

Criticism

1. Plato built his ideal state on the analogy of individual and this identification leads to confusion. He failed to distinguish ethics from politics. His ideal state is based not merely on analogy but almost identification between the individual and the state, which is quite wrong.
2. Plato fails to condemn the institution of slavery which was a fundamental evil.
3. Plato's system of communism of women and temporary marriage is detestable and unethical.
4. Plato is a moralist rather than a political idealist. His assumption that the state should control the entire lives of its citizens is false and contrary to human liberty.
5. By the system of functional specialization, Plato tends to dwarf the personality of the individual. There is no possibility of any full development of human personality in his ideal

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state.

6. Plato completely ignores the lower class in his ideal state which forms the great bulk of population. Such negligence may divide the society into two hostile groups.

Plato on Justice

The ideal state Plato talks about is based on his concept of Justice. The title of his most famous work "Republic" means Justice in Greek and it should not be taken in its Latin sense meaning "state or the polity" Plato strikes an analogy between the human organism on the one hand and social organism on the other. Human organism according to Plato contains three elements- Reason, Spirit and Appetite. An individual is just when each part of his or her soul performs its functions without interfering with those of other elements. For example, the reason should rule on behalf of the entire soul with wisdom and forethought.

The element of spirit will sub-ordinate itself to the rule of reason. Those two elements are brought into harmony by combination of mental and bodily training. They are set in command over the appetites which form the greater part of man's soul. Therefore, the reason and spirit have to control these appetites which are likely to grow on the bodily pleasures. These appetites should not be allowed, to enslave the other elements and usurp the dominion to which they have no right. When all the three agree that among them, the reason alone should rule, there is justice within the individual.

Corresponding to these three elements in human nature there are three classes in the social organism. Philosopher class or the ruling class which is the representative of reason; auxiliaries, a class of warriors and defenders of the country is the representative of spirit; and the appetite instinct of the community which consists of farmers, artisans and is the lowest rung of the ladder. Thus, comparing the human organism and the social organism, Plato asserts that functional specialization demands from every social class to specialize itself in the station of life allotted to it. Justice, therefore to Plato is like a manuscript which exists in two copies, and one of these is larger than the other. It exists both in the individual and the society. But it exists on a larger scale and in more visible form in the society. Individually "justice is a 'human virtue' that makes a man self consistent and good: Socially, justice is a social consciousness that makes a society internally harmonious and good."

Justice is thus a sort of specialization. It is simply the will to fulfill the duties of one's station and not to meddle with the duties of another station, and its habitation is, therefore, in the mind of every citizen who does his duties in his appointed place. It is the original principle, laid down at the foundation of the State, "that one man should practice one thing only and that the thing to which his nature was best adapted". True justice to Plato, therefore, consists in the principle of non-interference. The State has been considered by Plato as a perfect whole in which each individual which is its element, functions not for itself but for the health of the whole. Every element fulfils its appropriate function. Justice in the platonic state would, therefore, be like that harmony of relationship where the Planets are held together in the orderly movement. Plato was convinced that a society which is so organized is fit for survival. Where man is out of their natural places, there the co-ordination of parts is destroyed, the society disintegrates and dissolves. Justice, therefore, is the citizen sense of duties.

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Justice is, for Plato, at once a part of human virtue and the bond, which joins man together in society. It is the identical quality that makes good and social. Justice is an order and duty of the parts of the soul; it is to the soul as health is to the body

Plato on Education:

Education is the key to Plato's scheme of a just and virtuous society. Plato talks about social justice and individual justice and the just individual is creation of an appropriate and hence just education. The edifice of Plato's theory of the Ideal State ruled by the philosopher kings/queens rests on the pillars of his theories of education and the communism. Plato realized the importance of education in defining and controlling knowledge for a hegemonic social order.

Through state controlled and maintained education system the rulers could create such mindsets that would help retaining the social order and harmony.

The importance of education in Plato's political scheme

He considered education to be sure cure of the all ills of the society. Like his theory of communism, the theory of education is also a logical corollary of the theory of ideal state. He constructs it for his central concern of the justice. Justice for him is everyone's acting according to his nature. And one can know and realize one's nature though education. For him taking care of education is state's foremost responsibility, as it is instrumental to create politically unequal classes and maintain it in the context of politically egalitarian Athens, notwithstanding the economic inequalities.

The Education system

The education propounded by Plato is to make the philosopher king. The person who would become philosopher king would have gone through the education system Plato propounded.

Plato divides the education into two parts – elementary and higher. As the “early life is very impressible” and the children are like wax and can be molded in the shape, one wishes to. Hence the education begins from the birth itself.

The elementary education

Elementary education: This is to be conducted between 1-18 years and additionally two years of compulsory military training must be done. They should be taught music to develop the power of reason by softening spirit. Gymnastic is taught to develop poise to feelings and temper the spirit. Poetry, music and other form of art is taught to develop moral inclinations. Censorship of poetry and literature is to be strictly followed. Literature that promotes fear, meekness and deception and cowardice should be banned from curriculum.

Higher education: At the age of 20 those who are qualified passes the elementary training shall be moved to higher education. They are taught Arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and harmony to inculcate Truth, free intellectual inquiry. At the age of 30, those who are qualified shall be trained in dialectics, metaphysics and logic and philosophy for the next five years.

From 35-50 they would be trained in military and political life. The true goal of education is to inculcate civic virtue who can respond in a just responsible and self manner to public issues.

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The main goal of education is to prevent corruption, sense of rights and obligations, traditions and laws of land needed for sustenance of political order

Plato on Communism

Plato's theory of communism seeks to abolish the institutions of property and family among the ruling classes to keep them incorruptible and dedicated to governance.

The Communism of Property

The gist of Plato's communism is deprivation of all the members of the ruling classes, the guardians from having any private property including private house, land or gold and silver (wealth). Their survival needs shall be taken care by the commodities collected from the producing classes in the form of taxes. They shall live in the state managed barracks and eat in the common mess.

As has been already mentioned, the communism applies for only ruling classes and not for producing masses. The private ownership of property by ruling classes is to be replaced by their collective ownership of property. There shall be collective domination over the producing masses under the direction of philosopher king with the coercive apparatus of the armed auxiliaries.

The ruling classes are forced to leave the longing for gold and silver and also of private wives in the larger interest of the state. They shall be paid no salary or allowances, their essential needs shall be taken by the state. The longing for property corrupts the rulers and makes them greedy and selfish that would lead to instability of the state. Also involvement of rulers into economic activities shall be a deviation from their role and commitment to the justice, i.e. to serve the people by way of maintaining the class-divided social order. Also, in his opinion, family and property were the chief sources of disunity and social tension.

Plato's arguments in defense of abolition of the institution of property among the ruling classes are not economic in terms of the nature of ownership of means of production and exchange, but moral, political and psychological. Plato hold that individuals do not exist and act as individuals in the self-interest but exist as parts of collectivity (state) and must subordinate the self-interest to the collective. As the theory of communism is a corollary of the theory of justice of which the non-interference is one of the specific features, Philosophers and soldiers must not interfere in the economic activities, the prerogative of the ruled classes – the producing classes. Therefore it is imperative on the classes of philosophers that they selflessly devote themselves to their duties of ruling.

The philosophers and warriors are the embodiments of the cardinal virtues, wisdom and courage respectively; therefore they must save themselves from getting trapped into lowly faculty—the appetite, the desires and passions are whose mean attributes. Appetite would blunt their reason or spirit and disturb the balanced equilibrium of the relationship between individual and the collectivity that would be detrimental to justice. Plato's primary purpose of abolition of private property among the ruling classes is political, i.e. stability of his Ideal state. The communism applies only to the ruling classes, a miniscule minority of the population. Plato's belief that wealth has a corrupting influence on politics hence the rulers must be deprived of it, to the extent that the words ownership disappears from their vocabulary.

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Communism of Wives

Plato convincingly proves the equality of women with men after considering all the possible objections and arguments. He arrives at the conclusion of the need of abolition of family. This was a revolutionary novel idea to his time where women were married in childhood and confined in to four walls of family and domestic chorus all their life.

Plato in a way pleads for women's emancipation from patriarchal family on the ground of their equality with men in all aspects if given the same conditions of bringing up, education and opportunities. Therefore confining women into domestic chorus was wasting half of the potential social talent.

The nomenclature, 'communism of wives' does not suite the content that is not about arrangement of 'wives' among the 'husbands' but abolition of the institution of family itself for the Guardian class. There is no privacy and no scope of individual men and women forming any regular or permanent bond. Plato argues the abolition of family on two counts.

First argument is that Family, according to him is linked with property and is equally distractive and corrupting as property. The rulers must not waste time and energy in familial responsibility but devote themselves in the invention of the truth, i.e. in the comprehension of the Idea of Good. Before coming to his idea of the regulated sexual intercourse and unique eugenics, let us quickly glance through Plato's arguments against the family of guardians, apart from wastage of female social potentialities.

- Family causes selfish tendencies detrimental to social unity and harmony lack of commitment to the state.
- Family is hurdle for women's equal education and function as guardians and hence an obstruction in their emancipation.
- Abolition of the institutions of marriage and family is essential for the moral development of guardians.
- The maintenance of family needs wealth implying that the involvements of the guardians in economic activities interfering into the realm of economic producers deviating from their political duties in violation of the principle of justice.

After critiquing the family, Plato proposes his new scheme, "... A law that follows from that principle (male and female guardians having all occupations in common) and all that has gone before, namely that, of these guardians, no one man and one woman have to set up house together privately: wives have to be held in common by all; so too are the children. No parent is to know his own child or any child his parent." All the children are brothers and sisters and all adults are their mothers and fathers.

The Ideal state would need future guardians. Plato recommends a state regulated sexual association of men and women on festive occasions for procreation and not for pleasure. "The worthy men and women, who have special accomplishments in the service of state must be coupled together more often for superior offspring's. Plato's this scheme is based on his genetic misconception, "bad crow lays bad eggs".

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For the best unions the Ruler should intelligently maneuver the draw of lots. “They would have to invent some ingenious system of drawing lots, so that at each pairing off the inferior would blame his luck not the Rulers.” Plato undermines the emotive and impulsive aspects of human personality and subordinates them to rational aspects and considers sex not as a human need but only an instrument to produce future guardians. “As soon as children are born, they will be taken by officers appointed for the purpose, who may be men or women or both, because offices are to be shared by both the sexes. The children of the better parents they take to crèche to be reared in the care of nurses living apart in certain quarter of the city. The children of inferior parents and any children of the rest that are defective are hidden away in some appropriate manner that must be kept secret.” It is to be noted that infanticide of defective children was practiced at Sparta.

Plato on philosopher king

According to Plato, a philosopher has a rational mind, he has wisdom as virtue, he has knowledge and he only knows the *Idea of Good* and all these qualities make him to be the best ruler of the city-state. However, since there is little possibility of philosophers becoming rulers, Plato argues, a ruler must also be a philosopher. This will enable the ruler to govern his State in an ideal way. Plato believes that a ruler must undergo an extensive study of philosophy. A philosopher searches for *Absolute Beauty* beyond all beautiful things, *Absolute Good* beyond all good things. He knows what are *Beauty, Temperance, and Justice* and uses this knowledge to mould the character of those over whom he rules.

When a philosopher king rules, the laws would be the dictates of reason and his discretion would be better than inflexible laws. His reason and wisdom are the motive and the regulative forces in the *Ideal State*.

Bertrand Russell points out four basic points regarding the Platonic insistence of rulers also being philosopher:

- Goodness and Reality being timeless, the best state will be the one which more nearly copies the heavenly model (the Ideal State), by having minimum of change and maximum of static perfection, and its rulers should be those who best understand the eternal Good.
- If a man is to be a good statesman, he must know the Good. This he can only do by a combination of intellectual and moral discipline. If those who have not gone through this discipline are allowed to rule, they will inevitably corrupt.
- The third and fourth points tell the necessity of extensive education of rulers in mathematics, and the importance of leisure to wisdom respectively.

What all these arguments point out is that a philosopher king is the ideal ruler and hence Plato’s insistence that a ruler must also be a philosopher.

Plato as an Idealist Thinker

Plato’s *Republic*, unlike modern utopias, was perhaps intended to be actually founded. Many of its provisions, including some that seemed quite impracticable, were actually realized at Sparta. The rule of philosophers had also been attempted by Pythagoras. Indeed, the idea of a ruler also

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being a philosopher and a philosopher king ruling a State providing the best possible governance is very tempting. But it seems unattainable.

First of all, a philosopher becoming a ruler is unattainable. Giving the task of ruling to the philosopher who does not have the knowledge of statecraft would be very inadequate. Simply having the knowledge of abstract sciences like mathematics or dialectics is no preparation for a man of action which a philosopher ruler has to be.

Claude Levi-Strauss argues that the ideal state was unrealistic and unrealizable, for the philosopher was not a natural ruler and governing was thrust upon him in the larger interest of the community. Besides, Plato's conception of the rule of philosophy or dubbed as *ideocracy* is criticised as against the spirit of democracy, equality, liberty and free citizenship.

Plato rejected popular participation for the fear that ordinary people cannot comprehend *the Absolute Truth* and *the Idea of Good*. In this regard, Karl Popper famously called Plato as one of the *enemies of open society*. Popper says that Plato is anti-democratic, anti-individual and anti social change. As a matter of noteworthy, Popper argues that it is unimportant who governs. The key issue is to minimize misrule and prevent misuse and abuse of power. Popper further argues if the claims of absolute truth are falsified.

Aristotle, Plato's disciple, also argued that it would be better for a ruler to be worldly wise than to be wise in the world of ideas. What a ruler needs to know is not what is good in abstract but what is good for different individuals and different conditions of society. A ruler becoming a philosopher having superiority of the rational mind, the knowledge of the *Idea of Good*, ability to know *Absolute Truth* and ruling an ideal state with absolute perfection are all very tempting yet they remain too idealistic to realise.

Plato himself realised the impracticability of the rule of philosophy. He later offered his second-best state in the *Laws*, making a major theoretical shift. In *Laws*, his conception of the rule of philosophy is replaced by the rule of sovereign law. With Plato's own admission, we can conclude that the conception of the rule of philosophy is too idealistic to realise and this makes Plato an idealist thinker.

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