

1. Plato: The ideal state of Plato

In Context

Ideology	Focus	Influenced by
Rationalism	Philosopher King	Socrates, Homer, Protagoras, Parmenides, Pythagoras, Heraclitus
Influenced		Key Words
Augustine, Cicero, Plutarch, Descartes, Hobbes, Leibniz, Stuart Mill, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Marx, Hegel, Russell.		The Apology, The Republic, The Laws, The Meno, The Politicus.

Before Plato

594 BCE: The Athenian lawmaker Solon lays down laws that act as the foundation for Greek democracy.

450 BCE: Greek philosopher Protagoras says that political justice is an imposition of human

After Plato

335-323 BCE: Aristotle suggests that polity (constitutional government) is the most practical of the better ways to run a state.

54-51 BCE: Cicero writes *De re publica*, advocating a

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ideas, not a reflection of natural justice.

more democratic form of govt. than suggested by Plato's Republic.

Political Context of Plato's Philosophy:

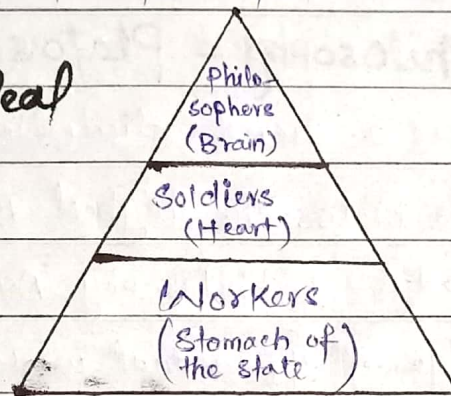
- His early adulthood coincided with the period of political dislocation following the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian War of 431-404 BCE.
- Which Overthrow of the democratic constitution of Pericles and the establishment of a ruling council of the Thirty Oligarchs came into existence.
- He had seen his friend and mentor - Socrates - condemned to death under the ensuing democracy.

1. Introduction - The ideal state of Plato:

- 'Until philosophers are kings, cities will never have rest from their vices.' The Republic, Plato.
- Student of Socrates and Teacher of Aristotle, Plato was one of the greatest philosophers in ancient Greece, born on 427 BC in Athens.
- In his Republic, Plato portrays ideal state. He considers ideal state as the panacea for the crisis he saw in city-state, the

ideal state is to be ruled by the philosopher King, which he conceived in his pursuit of reason. The concept of Justice, Plato's communism, and Education scheme of Plato's were some of the important principles of Plato's ideal state.

Plato's ideal state



2. Platonic Concept of Ideal State:

- "Ideal is the real", according to Plato reality only exists in the ~~real~~ ideas of things. According to him the permanent and eternal reality of anything is its idea (form). Plato like his teacher Socrates holds the idea that although the idea is manifested in the physical form behind the world of perception.
- According to him, the world of being is the ideal world which possesses universality while the world of becoming has particularity and changes from time to time and place to place. This concept of particularity & universality was

best illustrated in the "Allegory of Cave."

- Believing that ideal is real, Plato constructs his ideal state in "The Republic."

3. Distinctive Features of the Platonic Ideal State:

i. Rule of Philosophy - Plato's Philosopher King:

- Philosophy was a sacred discipline at that time.
- According to Plato, the highest virtue is the highest knowledge of Philosophy. According to him, the knowledge of the actual world can be achieved through senses and that is subjective while the knowledge of the ideal can only be grasped through reason which is objective.
- Philosopher King to Plato possess the highest knowledge of virtue and therefore, deserve to rule the state.

ii. Functional Specialization of Plato - Division of Soul and Society:

- The ideal state of Plato was based on the analogy b/w an individual's soul & state.
- He applied Pythagoras's tripartite concept of human nature dividing the human soul into three parts: the desiring parts, the spirited part and the rational part.

- The rational part is the magnified form of human body; courage and appetite are the emotional or non-rational parts. He, therefore, divides his ideal state into three administrative faculties, Kings, Auxiliaries & Producers.
- He said that all these classes should perform their functions.

Brain --- reason/knowledge: the Ruling class (philosopher kings)

Heart --- courage/spirit: The Military class (Auxiliaries)

Belly --- appetite/desire: The professional class (Artisans)

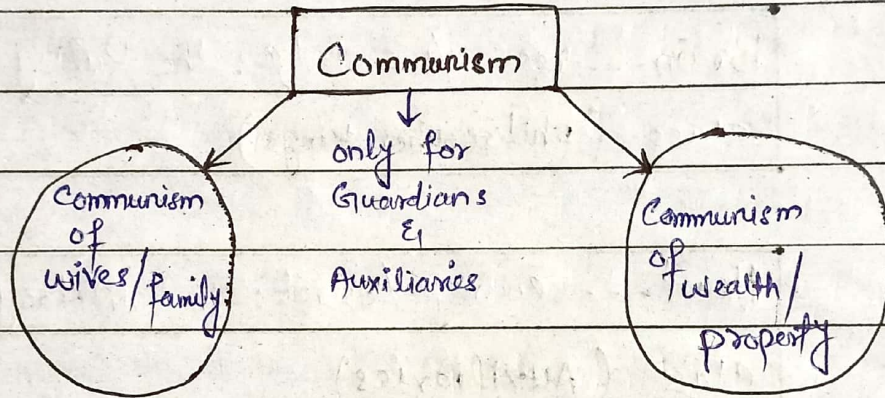
iii. Justice in State - Plato's Justice Theory:

- "Justice means minding one's own business and not meddling with other men's concerns." - Plato
- Plato built his ideal state on the concept of justice. The Plato justice means that every person should be given an opportunity to work according to his/her ability and aptitude. He says that justice binds society

together in a harmonious way.

iv. Plato's theory of Communism:

Plato favoured communism for his ideal state not only in the economic aspects but also in social and political aspects. Without communism there would be clash of ideas and interests between reason and appetite.



Communism of Property:

Plato was influenced by the spirit of Sparta wherein the citizens were denied the use of money and the privilege of engaging in trade. Thus, Plato's communism was ascetic in character.

Communism of wives/family:

Plato deprived the kings and soldiers of wives. These two classes are only allowed to have state-regulated temporary common wives & common children.

v. Educational scheme of Plato's ideal State:

Moreover, Plato devised his own state-led education system in order to prepare the

desired functionally specialized administrative class for his ideal state.

Aspects of Plato's Education system:

There were two aspects of Plato's education scheme.

Elementary Education:

- The elementary education begins at three and ends at twenty. From 3 to 6 years the children are to be imparted education through the narration of mythological stories which include certain moral and religious truth. From seven to eighteen years they are to be given the lesson of gymnastics in reading & writing, taught music, poetry and mathematics. From 18 to 20 years more gymnastics to be imparted, such as military training & war tactics.

Higher Education:

- Plato proposed a screening test at the age of 20. Those who failed the test, send them to production field, the rest will go for higher education. He said from 20 to 30 years taught Mathematics and Astronomy to passed students from basic to advance. From 30 to 35 years taught them philosophy. With the help of another eliminating test people who have courage send them

to military and send them the rest to the field for 15-years. At the age of 50, those who have demonstrated real ability and served with genuine distinction become the ruling guardians from here emerges the idea of philosopher King.

vi. Monarchy form of government in Platonic ideal state:

- Plato was very much disappointed by the democracy of Athens. Therefore, he favoured a monarchy form of government for his ideal state. According to him, monarchy is the best form of govt. because a wise ruler (Philosopher King) rules the state.
- Such a King is immune to making mistakes. Moreover, the King should remain beyond the law because the law is devised for common people and the King never breaks the law of the state.

vii. Absolutism of Philosopher King - Concept of Absolute rule:

- As demanded by specialization and non-interference, Plato gives absolute power to the philosopher ruler. He said that philosopher Kings are above the law and are not subject to criticism b/c

they represent absolute wisdom.

viii. **Restriction on harmful art & literature:**

- In constructing his ideal state, Plato suggest that some portion of poetry and art should not be taught to philosopher rulers and soldiers because it would make them cowards. He wants to scrutinize the art and literature in the state.

ix. **Aristocracy in Platonic Ideal State:**

- Plato supported aristocracy as a good approach to government in his book *The Republic*.
- He says that the ruling class must consist of few able and intellectual persons. According to Plato the ruling power must not be given to an ordinary man.

Plato's Classification of government

Philosophical Aristocracy
Rule by the Best

Timocracy
Rule by Martial Honor

Oligarchy
Rule by the wealthy

Democracy
Rule by the many

Tyranny
Rule by a Tyrant

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x. Equality between men and women in Plato's ideal state:

- Plato has given equal places to both men and women in his ideal state. In his opinion, the day women's liberation or independence comes, it will be said that a real ideal state has been built. Keeping women in the corner of the house is like depriving half of the country of their right to vote.
- Unlike his great student, he says that both man and woman should be provided with equal facilities, particularly educational facilities by the state. If a woman has reason and is intellectual, she should become a philosopher ruler.

4. Critical Analysis of Plato's Ideal State:

- The ideal state as portrayed by Plato has been described as only a utopian, impossible of putting into reality. Such a state has never existed in the history & never shall come to existence. Various points of criticism on his ideal state are detailed below:

i. Lack of Realism and Practicality in Platonic ideal state - Aristotle Critique on Plato ideal State:

- Aristotle in his book "Politics", criticized Plato's ideal state for its lack of practicality and feasibility. He argued that Plato's vision of a perfectly just society, where philosophers rule and private property is abolished, was too idealistic and did not take into account the complexities of human nature and society.

ii. Aristotle Critique on Role of Philosopher-King of Platonic ideal state:

- In Plato's ideal state, philosopher kings would be the wisest and most virtuous individuals. But philosophy only creates men of thinking than men of action.
- Aristotle questioned whether it was realistic to expect philosopher to govern effectively, as he believed that philosopher might lack practical experience and political wisdom. He also argued that political leadership requires a different set of skills and virtues than philosophy.

iii. Karl Popper Criticised Plato ideal state a Rigid and closed system leading

to totalitarianism:

- Karl Popper blamed Plato for the rise of totalitarianism in the 20th century, seeing Plato's philosopher kings, with their dreams of 'social engineering' and 'idealism', as leading directly to Adolf Hitler & Joseph Stalin.
- Karl Popper in "Open Society and its enemies", wrote; "All such states which claim to provide an ideal way of life through rigidity and closeness turn out to be the worst forms of totalitarian states." (-Popper).

iv. Platonic ideal state a myth by social thinkers:

- The very notion of the ideal state is regarded a myth by the modern social thinkers. They hold that the conception of society must have a scientific foundation. A metaphysical or mystic religious interpretation of society is nothing but abuse and unreasonable.

v. Aristotle criticised Plato's narrow conception, unrealistic, and defective scheme of education:

- Plato's ideal state placed a strong emphasis on a rigorous and centralized education system, with an emphasis on the study of mathematics and philosophy.
- Aristotle questioned whether this education system

was suitable for all citizens and whether it allowed for the development of a diverse range of skills and talents.

- The Platonic conception of education is narrow to the extent it is obviously meant for the guardian classes. It gives no scheme for the education of economic or producing class.

vi. **Platonic ideal state Communism was Half-Communism, focus on only one section of Society:**

- Plato's Communism was half Communism. It did not cover all section of society. Plato applied his Communism on only one section, the guardians. The guardian was debarred to retain property and wife. The peasants and artisans were free from that restriction. He did not apply it to the vast of the people.

vii. **Communism of wives impossible because Abolition of family has weakened the community:**

- Plato on the one hand deprived the guardians from the family life; on the other hand, he excessively permitted the woman to participate in the affairs of state. Women always render

valuable service to family life. But, Plato introducing concept of communism indirectly weakened the community. Aristotle criticized Plato's views on family and reproduction, he believed that ^{the} family was a fundamental and natural institution.

viii. Separation of classes in Platonic ideal state would lead to conflict and affect performance of the state:

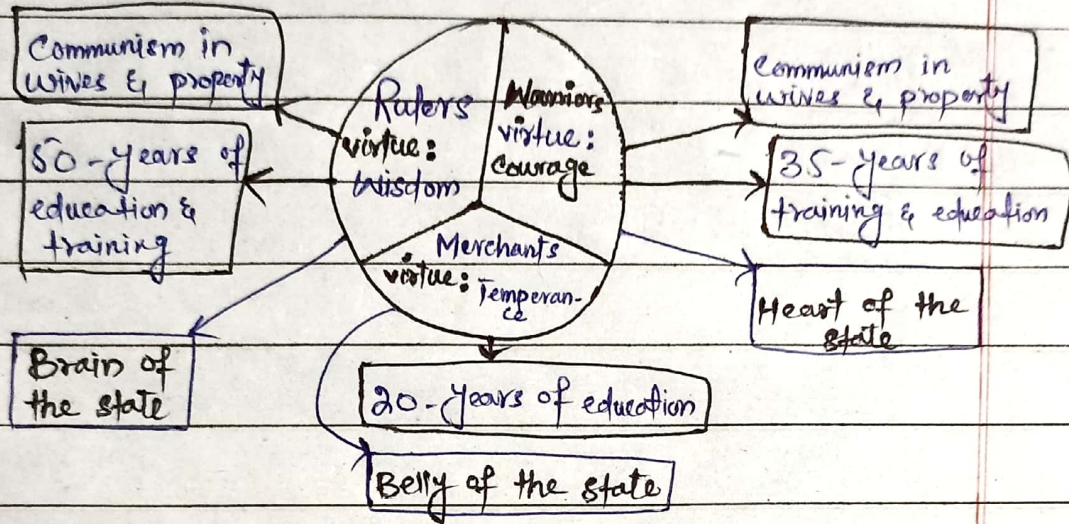
- Plato's ideal state was based on strict separation of classes, with rulers and auxiliaries at the top and laborers at the bottom. Aristotle argued that this separation would create resentment and conflict between classes and would be detrimental to the functioning & performance of the state.

ix. Lack of individualism in Plato's ideal state according to Aristotle which harm individual liberty:

- Aristotle believed that Plato's ideal state placed too much emphasis on the collective good and neglected the importance of individual rights and freedoms. He believed that individuals should have more autonomy and that the state

should be structured to protect individual liberties.

5. Summary of Platonic ideal state:



6. Conclusion:

- It is however, unfair to hold that Plato preached utopia. What Plato gave was the ideal or form of the state. It was model for all times and countries, which the actual state should try to achieve the nearer the actual state is to this ideal, the better it would be.
- Plato's influence on Philosophy and social thinking is so profound that it is felt even in the modern age. Admittedly Plato has built up a utopia but it cannot be denied that he was great creative thinker as many of his ideas still haunt the philosophers of the world.