

PLATO

Plato: Life, Influence, and Contributions to Political Philosophy (427-327 B.C.)

Introduction

Birth and Aristocratic Background:

Plato, originally named Aristocles, was born in Athens in 427 B.C. into an aristocratic family. He belonged to royal blood on both sides, being related to Solon, the famed lawgiver, from his mother's side. His name "Plato" was attributed to his broad shoulders and sturdy build.

Mentorship by Socrates:

Plato was a devoted pupil of Socrates, and his philosophical mission was largely shaped by the desire to justify Socrates' teachings. His main goal was to discover eternal principles of human conduct such as justice, temperance, and courage—qualities that Plato believed would bring happiness to the individual and stability to the state.

TURNING POINT: DISILLUSIONMENT WITH DEMOCRACY

Execution of Socrates (399 B.C.):

The execution of Socrates, when Plato was 28 years old, had a profound impact on his life. It marked a turning point where he developed a deep-seated distrust for democracy, which he blamed for the unjust death of his mentor.

Ethical Leadership:

After the execution, Plato became a prominent ethical leader for the young and a critical voice of Athenian rulers and citizens. His disillusionment with Athenian democracy only deepened after the city's defeat by Sparta in the Peloponnesian War.

PHILOSOPHICAL WANDERINGS AND INTELLECTUAL PURSUITS

Years of Travel and Learning:

Following Socrates' death, Plato traveled for 12 years, seeking wisdom from various sources. He explored different philosophical schools of thought, including the mysticism of the Pythagorean society in Southern Italy, which emphasized class structure and mathematics—both of which greatly influenced his later work.

Influence of Egyptian Society:

Plato likely studied mathematics in Egypt and was impressed by the rigid caste system, which further informed his political theories, particularly his belief in a structured, hierarchical society.

THE SYRACUSE EXPERIENCE AND RETURN TO ATHENS

Encounter with Dionysius I:

In Syracuse, Plato attempted to teach philosophy to the tyrant king Dionysius I but was met with disappointment. After being enslaved briefly by Dionysius, he was ransomed by friends and returned to Athens.

Founding of the Academy:

Upon his return, Plato founded the Academy, the first major school of philosophy, which became a center for the education of statesmen and scholars. His Academy trained men to follow a divine system of education, which Plato envisioned as a common possession of humankind.

PLATO'S PHILOSOPHICAL METHOD AND WORKS

Plato's Dialogues:

Plato's philosophical works, totaling 36 treatises, are primarily written in the form of dialogues. His method was to use analogies and dialectical reasoning to draw out arguments. His early dialogues, such as Apology, Crito, Protagoras, and Phaedo, are largely negative critiques of Athenian society and democracy.

The Republic and Major Works:

Plato's positive and constructive ideas emerge in his later works, particularly *The Republic*, where he outlines his vision of an ideal state governed by philosopher-kings. Other significant works include *Statesman* and *Laws*, where he further explores his political theories.

Methodology:

Plato's approach was systematic, using analogies to illustrate complex philosophical concepts. His philosophy was deeply ethical, aiming to discover real justice, temperance, and courage, which he believed were the foundations of a stable and happy society.

The Golden Bough of Plato

Divine Philosophy:

Plato's philosophy is often described as a "golden bough," a divine force that serves as a guide for the good and wise throughout the universe. His philosophy shines by its own virtue, providing timeless insight into the nature of human conduct and governance.

LATER LIFE AND LEGACY

Recognition and Influence:

In the later years of his life, Plato achieved unprecedented personal recognition. His Academy became the foremost school of philosophy in Athens, attracting scholars from across the Greek world.

Enduring Belief in Education:

Plato never abandoned his belief in the importance of education. He continued to train men in his divine system of education, one that he hoped would become a permanent legacy for mankind.

Conclusion

Plato's life was shaped by both personal and political turmoil, from the execution of his mentor Socrates to his experiences with tyrants and the flaws of democracy. These experiences led him to develop one of the most influential philosophies in Western thought, built on the foundation of Socratic teachings and his own intellectual explorations. His Academy trained generations of statesmen, and his written works, especially *The Republic*, laid the foundation for European political thought, influencing scholars and political systems for centuries. Plato's golden bough of wisdom continues to guide and inspire, its light enduring through time.

1. REPUBLIC OF PLATO

INTRODUCTION

The Republic is a seminal work produced during Plato's early maturity and speculative vigor. It significantly contributes to political philosophy while also exploring various domains, including education, economics, moral philosophy, history, and metaphysics. These subjects are discussed within the context of the state, reflecting the all-encompassing nature of the city-state's authority. Unlike contemporary analyses, which may separate such discussions from state governance, Plato viewed the good life and good citizenship as intertwined, asserting that one cannot exist without the other.

The Good Life and Politics

Plato posited the existence of an objective good and believed that discovering and implementing truths could foster a good life within a well-ordered state. He aimed to formulate a science of politics akin to medical science, where knowledge underpins practice. Although Plato recognized that no ideal state existed, he maintained that it should be possible.

Politics as an Art

Plato emphasized that politics is an art requiring expert knowledge for effective practice. He criticized the democratic system of Athens, particularly the reliance on the Periclean principle of "happy versatility." By comparing the statesman's art to that of the physician, Plato argued that governance relies on rational principles

rather than mere intuition. Consequently, he viewed public opinion as incapable of guiding state policy, asserting that virtue is knowledge and that only a select few possess the virtue necessary for leadership. The state, in Plato's vision, should be structured to facilitate rule by this virtuous elite, contrasting sharply with politicians who sought popularity at the expense of effective governance.

THE SEARCH FOR JUSTICE

Dialogue Form

Plato employs the dialogue form, with Socrates at the center, to explore the concept of justice. The narrative begins in the home of Cephalus, who suggests that justice involves speaking the truth and repaying debts. This sparks a deeper examination of justice's true nature.

Polemarchus' Definition of Justice

Polemarchus, Cephalus' son, argues that justice means giving everyone their due, leading to further questioning by Socrates. Socrates challenges the notion that justice can involve harming one's enemies, highlighting that such actions may ultimately worsen the enemy. This prompts a more complex exploration of what justice truly entails.

Thrasymachus' Radical View

Thrasymachus, representing radical Sophist thought, asserts that justice is merely the interest of the stronger, arguing that those in power exploit their position for personal gain. Socrates counters this individualistic view, advocating that true self-interest aligns with the collective good of the community. The just ruler, he argues, prioritizes the well-being of the entire society rather than pursuing personal ambition.

Glaucon's Challenge

Glaucon introduces a more nuanced challenge, suggesting that while individuals may wish to exploit others, they fear the repercussions of injustice. He argues that laws arise from this fear, asserting that justice is a product of self-interest tempered by prudence. Socrates acknowledges this complexity and seeks a more profound understanding of justice, challenging the superficial definitions presented thus far.

Justice and the Soul

Socrates proposes that justice cannot be understood separately from the soul of man, thus necessitating a dissection of human nature. He argues that the state reflects the individual "writ large," indicating that an analysis of the state will reveal insights into human character.

The Structure of the State

Class Division and Motivation

Plato categorizes society into three classes based on dominant motivating forces: desire, spirit, and reason. The largest class is driven by appetite, while those motivated by spirit are fewer, and the smallest group is driven by reason. Each class fulfills its role based on its predominant characteristic, contributing to the state's overall harmony.

Specialization of Function

Plato argues that the state arises from the need to fulfill mutual needs through a division of labor. He advocates for specialization, asserting that individuals should perform the tasks for which they are best suited. This principle ensures that the state operates efficiently, preventing individuals from encroaching on roles that do not align with their capabilities.

The Ideal State

The ideal state comprises three classes: artisans, guardians, and rulers (philosopher-kings). Artisans fulfill the material needs of society, guardians provide military defense, and rulers, motivated by reason, ensure the community's welfare. Plato argues that this specialized structure leads to a just society, where each individual performs their appropriate function.

Justice as Harmony

Plato defines justice as “giving to every man his due,” emphasizing that this concept transcends legalistic definitions. Justice represents internal harmony within both the individual and the state, achieved when societal roles are properly ordered. A well-structured state fosters individual fulfillment and societal stability, aligning the interests of the ruler with those of the citizens.

Conclusion

Plato's Republic articulates a vision of justice rooted in the specialized roles within society. Through a systematic analysis of the state and individual, he connects moral philosophy to political governance, asserting that the true nature of justice lies in the harmonious functioning of society. By defining justice in this context, Plato seeks to illuminate the principles necessary for constructing an ideal state, thereby addressing the broader human quest for a just and fulfilling life.

2. Education in Plato's Republic

Chief Concern of Education

In *The Republic*, education is recognized as a foundational element for achieving justice within the ideal state. Plato asserts that justice involves placing individuals in roles for which they are best suited based on their inherent abilities and training. The educational system is intricately designed to cultivate these abilities, promoting specialization that ultimately leads to a just society. Through this structured education, Plato envisions a harmonious community where each member contributes to the common good according to their unique talents.

Maintenance of Society

Beyond fostering justice, education serves to maintain the societal structure envisioned by Plato. He emphasizes the need for censorship and the establishment of the rulers' absolute authority to protect this structure. In contrast to modern educational ideals rooted in democratic values, Plato critiques democracy for its potential to foster amateurism and inefficiency in governance. His focus is on creating a system where the best minds are cultivated and empowered to lead.

Role of Guardians

Plato argues that only the guardians of the state—the philosopher-kings—are equipped with the time, authority, and capability for speculative thought necessary for effective governance. This ruling class, composed of individuals who have undergone rigorous education and philosophical training, is uniquely qualified to make decisions for the benefit of the entire community. In Plato's vision, these intellectual leaders govern without being swayed by law, custom, or public opinion, ensuring a rational and stable political environment.

Communism in Plato's Republic

Concept of Communism

A distinctive aspect of Plato's *Republic* is the implementation of communism among the ruling classes. Unlike modern interpretations of communism, Plato's version is not focused on improving living standards for all citizens; instead, it targets the political and moral objectives of creating a unified and

effective leadership. This communism extends to both property and family, aiming to eliminate personal interests that might detract from the common good.

Disruption of Society

Plato acknowledges that disputes over property can lead to social discord. He believes that allowing individual property ownership among the ruling and military classes would disrupt the balance and harmony essential to the ideal state. Therefore, he proposes the abolition of private property for these classes, while allowing the artisan class—more influenced by their appetites—to retain ownership of property.

Rationale for Communism

For the guardians, communism mitigates the risks associated with individualism stemming from property disparities. By eradicating competition for political power driven by economic interests, Plato seeks to cultivate a harmonious republic where the focus remains on governance and the welfare of the state rather than personal gain.

Regulation of Family Relationships

Family Structure in the Upper Classes

In *The Republic*, Plato's plan for communism includes the regulation of family structures within the ruling and military classes. He advocates for the prohibition of traditional marriages and monogamous unions, asserting that procreation should be managed by the state to produce the best offspring for the community. This radical approach entails that children would be raised collectively, thereby eliminating individual parent-child bonds and fostering loyalty to the state over personal attachments.

Eugenics and Communism

The eugenic goals underlying this state-controlled breeding are inextricably linked to the communistic vision of property. By dismantling traditional family ties, Plato believes that rulers can govern effectively without the distractions of personal relationships or the conflicts that arise from property ownership. This strategy emphasizes the importance of producing citizens who are most capable of contributing to the state's objectives.

Women's Roles in the Republic

Equality of Women and Men

Plato's perspectives on women's roles are progressive for his time. He argues that, aside from physical differences, women should be treated as equals to men regarding civic duties and responsibilities. He posits that women in the ruling classes should bear children but not be burdened with childcare responsibilities, enabling them to participate fully in governance and public life.

Focus on Duties

Plato emphasizes that the roles of women should align with their capabilities rather than be confined by traditional gender roles. His advocacy for women's involvement in all state duties reflects his broader commitment to justice and the efficient functioning of the state, prioritizing societal needs over individual preferences.

Asceticism in Athenian Society

Critique of Athenian Lifestyle

Plato's ascetic disposition critiques the complexities and excesses of Athenian society. He believes that a return to simpler living is essential for nurturing civic virtue. The indulgence of appetites, he argues, has weakened Athenian resolve, leading to moral decay and a decline in military prowess. Plato's vision calls for a lifestyle that prioritizes the common good and the cultivation of the mind over personal pleasure.

Degenerative States in the Republic

Corruption of the Ideal State

Plato discusses the decline of the ideal republic through four degenerative stages:

1. *Timocracy* - A state where honor and spirit dominate but is less desirable than a reason-led government.
2. *Oligarchy* - The corruption of timocracy due to the prioritization of wealth and power among the few.
3. *Democracy* - Emerges from the dissatisfaction of the poor and leads to chaos and anarchy.
4. *Tyranny* - Arises from the manipulation of the masses by a demagogue, exploiting their desires for personal gain.

Critique of Democracy

In his analysis, Plato positions democracy unfavorably, asserting that the common man lacks the capacity for self-governance. He contends that the complexities of democratic systems can lead to instability, advocating instead for a governance model led by experts who possess the requisite knowledge and virtue to lead effectively.

Balance of Freedom and Authority

The Cost of Harmony

Plato's approach to achieving societal harmony may demand significant sacrifices from individuals, including the curtailment of personal freedoms in favor of collective good. He acknowledges that community plays a crucial role in shaping individuals but may underestimate the importance of individual rights and the potential for overreach by the state.

Conclusion on the Republic

Despite the flaws and contradictions in Plato's reasoning, *The Republic* remains a provocative work that raises essential questions about the balance between individual freedom and state authority. The dialogue encourages contemporary readers to consider the implications of governance and democracy, pondering whether a system led by experts could yield greater benefits, even at the cost of personal liberties. Ultimately, Plato's reflections on education, communal living, and governance challenge us to think critically about the ideal state and the role of the individual within it.

3. The Statesman: Overview

Both *The Statesman* and *The Laws* are products of a later period of Plato's life. *The Statesman* generally represents an attitude toward democracy that is slightly less antagonistic than that demonstrated in *The Republic*, though not yet as moderate as the view expressed in the early books of *The Laws*. It is likely that *The Statesman* preceded *The Laws*. While *The Republic* is considered better literature than either of the later works, it would be incorrect to assume that *The Statesman* and *The Laws* are indicative of Plato's declining mental powers. In some respects, Plato has become more conservative with his advancing years. He never repudiates his contention that *The Republic* presents the ideal state, but he acknowledges that the ideal may not be possible and that practicality is, after all, important.

The Role of the Statesman

Expert Rulership

The Statesman continues the attack upon amateurism launched in *The Republic*. The good statesman, like the guardian ruler, should be an expert. He rules because he knows how to rule; his capacities constitute his right. Political demagogues may claim to understand the problems of statecraft, but the statesman actually knows.

He is an artist who exercises his superior talents according to his own knowledge and discretion, without being constrained by the restrictive barriers of codified law. If the subject peoples of his realm may be improved by the ministrations of this artist statesman, whether or not they consent to the improvement is beside the point. In his arbitrary rule, the statesman may choose to use law or not, as he sees fit. He stands above the law even when he employs it.

Continuation of Republic Principles

An obvious repetition of some basic principles from *The Republic* is found here. Plato rejects democracy in favor of the rule of an able and talented guardian. The task of the ruler is to develop a virtuous people. Education is an important function of government, and law is viewed as inferior to knowledge. While the later book may warrant the same criticisms and praises applied to *The Republic*, it is noted that *The Statesman* lacks the powerful sweep of the earlier work. The book was not intended to be a similar venture, and in so far as it repeats the principles of *The Republic*, it may not hold overwhelming significance.

Law and Government in the Real World

Acknowledgment of Imperfection

When Plato transitions to a discussion of law and governmental problems in the real world, *The Statesman* contributes something new. Neither the ideal statesman nor the philosopher-king is to be found in this world. Nevertheless, life must continue and must follow the best direction possible under the circumstances. The law, previously ignored or attacked, is now recognized as a necessity. Though imperfect—containing both the collected foolishness and wisdom of the people—law holds value since it promotes stability.

Stability versus Ideal Harmony

The security and stability that result from strict adherence to the law are not as desirable as the harmony and unity present in the ideal state. However, stability at least prevents further degeneration. If the ignorant (and thus unjust) are to control government, they will do less harm if they are restrained by law.

Classification of States

New Classification Approach

Plato's focus on law as a device used in imperfect, existing states leads him to develop a new classification of states, differing from that presented in *The Republic*. In the earlier work, Plato arranged five kinds of states in the order of their virtue, each inferior step constituting a degeneration of the preceding state. These ranged from the ideal state of *The Republic* at the top through timocracy, oligarchy, and democracy, down to tyranny at the bottom.

Modification of Earlier Views

In *The Statesman*, Plato effectively sets the ideal state aside as desirable but impractical and proceeds to a two-fold classification of lawful and unlawful states. This new classification signifies a modification of Plato's earlier views. Democracy, as a governmental type, occupies an improved position. It is now designated as the worst of the lawful states but the best (or least dangerous) of the unlawful states.

Implications of the New Classification

This alteration does not reflect any view from Plato that democracy is inherently virtuous. He believes that the greater the concentration of authority, the more capacity exists for either good or evil, depending on whether the state is lawful or unlawful. Thus, lawful rule by one man is considered the best, while unlawful rule by one is the worst possible government. At any rate, constitutional or lawful democracy is now regarded by Plato as better than tyranny, oligarchy, and unconstitutional democracy.

The Indispensable Role of Law

More significantly, Plato assumes that in existing conditions—where men are far from perfect—law is an indispensable ingredient without which the forces of brutality and greed would rule unrestrained. Plato's loyalty to the principle of rule by the intelligent remains evident in *The Statesman*, though the passion found in *The Republic* has been restrained. Plato has approached a stage of moderation that is generally evident in *The Laws*.

4. The Laws

Overview of *The Laws*

The Laws is one of Plato's final works, composed during his later years and possibly published posthumously by a pupil. Despite signs of his declining literary talent, such as a tendency toward discursiveness, the text demonstrates moments of profound insight and intellectual vigor. This work reflects Plato's evolving thoughts on governance, law, and society, and while it may lack the artistic flair of earlier writings, it stands as a significant political treatise, arguably more impactful than his earlier work, *The Republic*.

Law as the Foundation of Governance

Substitution of Law for the Philosopher-King

In *The Laws*, Plato advocates for law as a substitute for the philosopher-king. He acknowledges the ideal of a wise ruler but concedes that such a ruler is not always practical. Since the perfect state—one governed by reason and philosophical wisdom—is unattainable, Plato argues for the establishment of a second-best state that closely aligns with the principles of the ideal.

5. *Role of Law*: While law and reason are not identical, Plato emphasizes that law is generally derived from reason and is, therefore, fundamentally sound. He recognizes that some laws may be foolish or unwise, but overall, law acts as a stabilizing force that guides individuals toward rational and predictable behavior.

The Sovereignty of Law

Plato asserts that law must hold a position of sovereignty over individuals. Human beings, by nature, are selfish, and without the restraints imposed by law, their pursuit of self-interest can disrupt social order.

1. *Generality of Law*: The laws must be general rather than specific to avoid biased applications that could arise from the whims of an imperfect ruler. Plato contends that law should serve the community as a whole, aiming to maintain social stability.

Comparison with *The Republic*

In *The Republic*, stability was maintained through the philosopher-guardians, who used an educational system and communal living to uphold order. In contrast, *The Laws* emphasizes the rigidity and difficulty of altering laws as the mechanism for maintaining societal order.

Shift from Class Division to Moderation

Abandonment of Class Principles

Plato moves away from the strict division of classes and specialization that characterized his earlier work, *The Republic*. Instead, he promotes the values of moderation and self-control as essential qualities for achieving unity and harmony within the community.

Mixed Constitution as an Ideal

Plato argues that the most effective state for fostering these virtues is one that adopts a mixed constitution, balancing elements of oligarchy and democracy.

1. *Oligarchy and Popular Control*: In this model, the powers of the oligarchy are restrained by popular control, signifying a significant shift in Plato's political philosophy. For the first time, he acknowledges the principle of consent, albeit in a limited and reluctant manner. This marks a departure from the rigid structure of governance established in *The Republic*, which was grounded in the absolute rule of the capable.

The Model State of *The Laws*

Construction of the Model State

As with *The Republic*, Plato employs the construction of a model state in *The Laws*. This ideal state is to be situated inland, distanced from the sea, to minimize the influence of naval militarism and discourage rampant commercialism.

1. *Naval Power vs. Land Armies*: Plato deems naval power as inferior to land-based military strength, which he believes leads to the corruption of a nation that relies upon it. He criticizes commercial traffic for bringing individuals whose primary concern is profit, thereby undermining civic responsibilities.

Agricultural Community

Plato envisions a community centered on agriculture, one that is self-sufficient without being excessively dependent on agricultural produce.

1. *Impact of Commerce*: He warns that a state producing insufficient or surplus goods will inevitably turn to commerce, which disrupts the desired privacy and isolation. An agricultural focus minimizes the potential for significant wealth accumulation, keeping citizens engaged in civic life rather than preoccupied with material pursuits.

Population and Organizational Structure

Plato proposes that the ideal number of citizens in the state should be set at *5,040*. This figure is deliberately chosen for its mathematical significance, as it can be evenly divided by all numbers up to 10 and by 12, facilitating efficient community organization.

1. *Tribal Division*: The state is to be organized into twelve tribes, each governed by a State Council consisting of twelve committees, ensuring equal representation and governance.

Currency and Measurement Systems

Plato advocates for a uniform numerical system for currency and measures, which is foundational for the organization of the state.

1. *Educational Importance*: Beyond its practical implications, this uniformity serves an educational purpose. The study of mathematics is crucial for youth, stimulating intellectual development and reinforcing the community's cohesion.

Conclusion

In *The Laws*, Plato presents a mature and pragmatic approach to governance, highlighting the importance of law as a stabilizing force in society. By advocating for a mixed constitution and emphasizing moderation, he acknowledges the complexities of human nature and the challenges of maintaining social order. This work not only reflects his philosophical evolution but also offers a profound exploration of the relationship between law, governance, and the ideal state.

5. Property in The Laws

Introduction

In **The Laws**, Plato revisits his ideas on property from **The Republic**, making significant adjustments to reflect his views on the ideal state while retaining some of the foundational principles. The management of property in the model state demonstrates Plato's ongoing concern for social purpose and civic responsibility.

Distribution of Land

Equal Lots for Citizens

Plato establishes a system in which the state is divided into **5,040 equal lots**, each assigned to a citizen. This arrangement ensures that each individual has a stake in the land while promoting the idea of equality among citizens.

Private Ownership with Social Responsibility

Although the land is privately owned, Plato emphasizes that citizens must be mindful of its **social purpose**. The notion of property extends beyond mere possession; citizens are encouraged to consider the collective well-being of the community in their use of land.

Restrictions on Land Transfer and Division

To maintain social stability and a consistent population, several restrictions are imposed on land:

- **Inheritance Only**: Land can only be transferred through inheritance, preventing arbitrary transactions that might disrupt the community's balance.
- **No Division of Land**: The land cannot be divided, ensuring that each citizen retains a significant and undiminished stake in the community's resources.

Population Control

Plato anticipates fluctuations in population and proposes measures to address this:

- **Population Increase**: If the population exceeds the ideal number, solutions such as **birth control** or **colonization** may be employed.
- **Population Decrease**: In cases of population decline, a system of **incentives and penalties** is suggested to encourage growth back to the optimal level.

Equality in Land Holdings

Maintaining Equality

Plato insists that land holdings must be maintained on a basis of equality, thereby reinforcing the community's foundation. The land is intended to support all citizens equally, contributing to a balanced social structure.

Inequality in Other Properties

While land distribution aims for equality, Plato acknowledges that achieving universal equality in other forms of property is impractical due to human nature. Thus, he allows for regulated inequality concerning personal property.

Regulation of Personal Property

Limits on Private Property

Each citizen is allowed to own private property up to **four times the value** of their land. This limitation serves multiple purposes:

- **Prevention of Excessive Wealth:** It aims to curb citizens' obsession with wealth and its potential to disrupt societal harmony.
- **Political Participation Criteria:** The limits on property ownership influence qualifications for political participation. Citizens are divided into four classes based on their property holdings, establishing a direct correlation between property and political power.

Class Structure and Political Power

The citizens are classified into four groups, each corresponding to different levels of property ownership:

1. **Lowest Class:** Owns the least amount of private property.
2. **Second Class:** Owns twice the value of their land.
3. **Third Class:** Owns three times the value of their land.
4. **Highest Class:** Owns four times the value of their land.

Each class's political influence is proportional to its property ownership, which reinforces the connection between economic standing and governance.

Further Regulation of Property

Excess Wealth and State Control

Citizens are required to surrender any wealth gained beyond the established limit (four times the value of their land) to the state. This regulation prevents excessive accumulation of wealth and promotes the community's interests over individual desires.

Role of Aliens in Commerce

Commercial activities are restricted to **aliens**, who are carefully regulated. This restriction serves to keep citizens focused on civic duties rather than on commercial pursuits, which can lead to greed and corruption.

Currency and Financial Regulation

Plato advocates for a localized currency system based entirely on community usage, prohibiting citizens from owning **gold or silver**. This measure seeks to prevent the accumulation of wealth and ensure that financial matters do not overshadow civic responsibilities.

Labor and Lifestyle

Subsistence from the Land

Plato's citizens derive their sustenance primarily from agricultural production. Their labor is designed to be **moderate**, avoiding excessive toil. The physical work is primarily carried out by **slaves**, allowing citizens to devote more time to civic duties and governance.

Balance Between Work and Civic Engagement

Citizens are encouraged to maintain a lifestyle that neither leads to a desire for luxury nor detracts from their commitment to the state. This balance reflects Plato's belief that excessive preoccupation with property matters is a disruptive influence on social harmony.

Conclusion

In **The Laws**, Plato seeks to reconcile the ideal of private property with the need for regulation to maintain social order. By promoting a system of equal land distribution and controlled inequality in personal property, he attempts to create a society where citizens remain focused on governance and civic responsibility. This approach echoes the principles of communal living from **The Republic**, albeit through regulatory means rather than outright abolition of private property. Ultimately, Plato envisions a state where all citizens participate in governance while drawing their sustenance from the land, ensuring the community's welfare takes precedence over individual desires.

6. Marriage and the Family in The Laws

Introduction

In **The Laws**, Plato revisits and reaffirms many ideas regarding marriage and family that he previously expressed in **The Republic**. He underscores the importance of including women in the civic sphere, advocating for their active participation in society.

Inclusion of Women in Civic Life

The Loss of Citizens

Plato begins by highlighting the **loss to the community** when women are excluded from contributing to civic efforts. He believes that excluding half of the population diminishes the potential for a well-rounded and effective society.

Equal Educational Opportunities

Plato argues for equal educational opportunities for women and men. He posits that women should have access to the same educational advantages as their male counterparts, emphasizing the need for:

2. **Shared Educational Experiences:** Education is compulsory for both genders, ensuring they receive similar training.
3. **Gymnastics and Military Training:** Women should engage in physical training akin to men, preparing them for roles in society, including military service.

Public Engagement

Plato incorporates a system of **common tables** to encourage public discussions among citizens, including women. While he does not mandate that women share tables with men, he suggests they should be seated nearby, facilitating engagement in civic discourse.

Inconsistencies in Office Holding

Despite advocating for women's education and military involvement, Plato neglects to address women's roles in **office holding** and **voting**. This omission raises questions about his stance on women's full participation in governance, highlighting potential inconsistencies within **The Laws**.

Marriage in Plato's Ideal State

Distinction from **The Republic**

Unlike in **The Republic**, where Plato proposes a community of wives and children, he refrains from this idea in **The Laws**. He acknowledges that the model state must accept human nature as it is, without imposing a communal family structure.

Marriage as a Public and Private Institution

Plato asserts that marriage serves both **public** and **private ends**. Although he does not advocate for communal marriages, he recognizes that marital unions can contribute to the welfare of the state.

Unions of Opposites

In promoting a balanced society, Plato suggests that marriages should involve **opposite traits**:

4. **Economic Pairings:** Wealthy individuals should marry those who are less affluent.
5. **Physical Complementarity:** Strong individuals should pair with the weak, and passionate individuals should unite with more placid partners.

This concept aims to balance extremes in human nature, fostering moderation within the community.

Lack of Legal Compulsion

Plato stresses that while the unions should be encouraged, there should be **no legal compulsion** in arranging marriages. Instead, citizens should be educated about the public significance of marriage, promoting voluntary choices that align with the greater good of the state.

Conclusion

In **The Laws**, Plato reiterates his commitment to integrating women into the civic framework of society, advocating for equal educational and professional opportunities. While he departs from the communal family model presented in **The Republic**, he still emphasizes the importance of marriage as a means of achieving social balance and promoting the welfare of the state. By advocating for marriages between individuals of differing traits, Plato aims to cultivate a harmonious society that mitigates the extremes of human nature. However, his omission of women's roles in governance presents a notable inconsistency, prompting further reflection on the implications of his views on gender and citizenship.

7. Government in the Model State of The Laws

Introduction

In *The Laws*, Plato outlines his vision of a government that strives for moderation by integrating elements from opposing political systems, specifically oligarchy and democracy. This blend reflects Plato's evolving perspective since *The Republic*, where he emphasized the dominance of intellectual authority. In *The Laws*, he acknowledges the importance of allowing citizens some degree of participation in governance, albeit cautiously.

A Balanced Government

Oligarchy and Democracy

Plato seeks to balance the qualities of **wisdom** and **numbers** by combining elements of both oligarchy (rule by the few) and democracy (rule by the many). However, his approach remains heavily weighted towards oligarchic principles, indicating a lack of complete trust in the general populace's capacity for self-governance.

Attitude Shift from *The Republic*

In *The Republic*, Plato concluded that a pure democratic system could not achieve the ideal state, advocating for a government led by the most knowledgeable. His later allowance for some democratic features in *The Laws* does not suggest a newfound faith in the average citizen's virtue but rather a pragmatic recognition that peace and harmony require some citizen voice in governance.

Structure of Government

Constitution of the Model State

Plato's constitution in *The Laws* is intricate, comprising assemblies, councils, and magistrates, but it diverges from the Athenian model in its selection methods and powers.

6. **Assembly:** All citizens capable of bearing arms are eligible for membership. However, their power is limited primarily to electing magistrates and council members.
7. **Election of Officials:** The assembly elects officials through a voting system considered aristocratic, contrasting with the democratic method of drawing lots.

Class Structure in Governance

Plato's government is structured around a **class system** that influences representation in the Council of 360:

8. **Four Classes:** Citizens are categorized based on personal property ownership, determining their political participation and representation.
9. **Wealth and Representation:** Although the council aims for equitable representation among classes, the wealthier classes dominate due to their significant holdings. Each class receives one-fourth of council seats, but wealthier individuals are disproportionately represented.

The Wealth-Virtue Equation

Dilemma of Governance

Plato grapples with the issue of associating wealth with virtue in *The Laws*:

10. **Abandonment of Idealism:** Unlike in *The Republic*, where he argues that knowledge equals virtue, in *The Laws*, he recognizes the impracticality of finding an ideal ruling class solely through education. Thus, he resorts to wealth as a measure of political capability.
11. **Pragmatic Governance:** He concludes that the most competent rulers will likely be those who have demonstrated shrewdness in accumulating property, suggesting a pragmatic approach to governance.

Limitations of the Wealth-Virtue Connection

While Plato acknowledges flaws in equating wealth with political virtue, he sees no alternative means of identifying capable rulers. This reliance on wealth for determining political power marks a significant philosophical shift.

Education in the Model State

Educational Emphasis

Plato maintains a strong focus on education, asserting its crucial role in fostering an ideal state:

12. **Curriculum:** Similar to *The Republic*, the educational program includes **gymnastics** and **music**, and it is compulsory for both men and women.
13. **Censorship and Control:** Literary materials undergo censorship to align with state values, ensuring a cohesive educational experience.
14. **Minister of Education:** The highest state officer is the minister of education, akin to a prime minister, emphasizing the centrality of education in governance.

Religion in *The Laws*

Shift in Religious Focus

Plato's treatment of religion in *The Laws* contrasts sharply with its minimal mention in *The Republic*:

15. **State Control of Religion:** He advocates for rigorous state oversight of religious practices, presuming that loyalty to the state and religious conformity are intertwined.
16. **Enforcement of Religious Law:** It is the state's duty to enforce obedience to religious doctrines, with severe penalties for heresy, including death. This reflects an early understanding of the potential for state power to extend into spiritual and moral realms.

Conclusion

In *The Laws*, Plato presents a nuanced vision of government that attempts to balance the principles of oligarchy and democracy. His acknowledgment of the need for some citizen involvement in governance signifies a pragmatic evolution in his thought. However, the predominance of oligarchic elements, the reliance on wealth as a measure of virtue, and the emphasis on education and state

control over religion reflect persistent themes in his philosophy. Ultimately, Plato's model state represents a complex interplay of ideals and practical considerations in the quest for a just society.

8. The Reversion to Authoritarianism in The Laws

Introduction

In *The Laws*, Plato aims to design a second-best yet practicable state that diverges from the authoritarian rule of the philosopher-kings depicted in *The Republic*. Initially, he presents the law as a guiding force intended to replace this authoritarianism, suggesting a more democratic framework of governance. However, as the discourse unfolds, it becomes evident that Plato's vision creates an illusion of democracy rather than genuine popular control.

The Illusion of Democracy

Initial Promises of Democracy

Plato's early discussions in *The Laws* emphasize the importance of law, suggesting a shift towards a more democratic structure. He praises the rule of law and advocates for a system that allows a degree of citizen participation in governance.

Erosion of Popular Control

As the narrative progresses, Plato introduces increasing barriers that restrict popular control over the state. These barriers ultimately undermine the initial promise of a democratic state, leading to a more authoritarian structure.

The Introduction of the Nocturnal Council

Composition and Purpose

The twelfth book of *The Laws* marks a significant turning point with the establishment of the **Nocturnal Council**, an influential body consisting of:

17. The ten oldest guardians of the law
18. The high-ranking minister of education
19. A select number of priests and other key officials

The minimum age requirement for council members is set at fifty years, ensuring a conservative outlook that prioritizes the status quo.

Inclusion of Younger Members

To prevent an absolute rule by the older members, Plato allows younger individuals aged thirty to forty to join the council, provided they gain the acceptance of the older officials. This stipulation creates a semblance of inclusivity while maintaining a hierarchy rooted in age and experience.

Role and Power of the Nocturnal Council

Functions and Authority

The Nocturnal Council functions as a **super-cabinet**, operating outside the standard legal framework. Its members hold significant power, including control over elective offices, thus eclipsing the democratic structures established earlier in the text.

Educational Requirements

Council members are required to study astronomy, which Plato associates with a deeper understanding of the divine. He argues that knowledge of the heavens brings one closer to God, which is essential for rulers tasked with maintaining the goodness and unity of the state.

Return to Authoritarianism

Shift from Democratic Institutions

With the establishment of the Nocturnal Council, the political institutions of the model state become subordinate. The council effectively diminishes the role of the earlier democratic frameworks Plato proposed, leading to a governance structure that resembles the authoritarianism of [The Republic](#).

Implications of the Council's Authority

Had Plato concluded [The Laws](#) before introducing the twelfth book, the political framework might have aligned more closely with traditional conservative ideals, potentially earning a favorable reception from figures like Edmund Burke. However, the Nocturnal Council imposes an authoritarian structure that lacks even the limited popular control initially suggested.

Critiques of the Nocturnal Council

Composition and Elite Nature

The composition of the Nocturnal Council has been subject to various interpretations. Some commentators argue that its members represent the philosopher-rulers of [The Laws](#), forming an elite group whose specialized knowledge grants them supreme authority. This knowledge, focusing on religion and mathematical mysticism, raises questions about its superiority compared to the expertise of the guardians in [The Republic](#).

Semi-Theocracy

Plato's introduction of the Nocturnal Council leads to the emergence of a [semi-theocracy](#), wherein priests play a central role in governance. This blend of religious authority with political power shifts the focus toward maintaining religious conformity while supervising state affairs.

Conclusion

In [The Laws](#), Plato's initial intentions of creating a more democratic and law-governed state devolve into an authoritarian structure dominated by the Nocturnal Council. Despite the appearance of a democratic framework, the reality reveals significant barriers to popular control and a return to the hierarchical governance reminiscent of [The Republic](#). The council's composition and its emphasis on religious and mathematical knowledge create a ruling elite that undermines the democratic aspirations initially set forth, resulting in a governance model that reflects a complex interplay between authoritarianism and theocracy.

Conclusions

Inability to Alter Fundamental Views

Plato's philosophical outlook remained largely unchanged throughout his works. He adhered closely to the teachings of Socrates, from whom he learned that virtue is intrinsically linked to knowledge. His belief system is characterized by several key assertions:

20. **Inequality of Knowledge:** Plato posits that individuals are not created equal; they differ significantly in their ability to acquire knowledge. This variance in capacity forms the foundation of his political philosophy.
21. **Role of the Elite:** This inherent inequality leads to the conclusion that governance should be in the hands of a knowledgeable and virtuous elite. Consequently, those less capable of understanding must be guided and disciplined by their more knowledgeable counterparts.

Political Essence of Plato's Works

The core political philosophy encapsulated in *The Laws*, *The Statesman*, and *The Republic* revolves around the idea that:

22. The state must be governed by those who possess knowledge and virtue, which Plato sees as essential for societal well-being.

Societal Analysis

Beyond Politics

Plato's work extends beyond mere political theory; it encompasses a broader analysis of society and its challenges. His exploration includes:

23. **Reciprocal Needs:** Plato's ideas reflect a logical pursuit of fulfilling reciprocal needs within a community, indicating his belief in the interconnectedness of societal members.

Psychological Foundations

Despite the power of his thesis, it is important to note that:

24. **Faulty Psychological Premises:** The psychological assumptions underpinning his analysis are considered flawed, undermining the validity of his conclusions.

Authority and Improvement

Plato's concept of authority in *The Republic* is absolute but is framed with the intention of fostering individual and societal improvement. Key points include:

25. **Neglect of Individual Liberty:** While he prioritizes the community over individual rights, this raises concerns about the balance between individual liberty and communal responsibility. Historically, the neglect of societal needs in favor of individual freedom has also led to issues.

Critique of Tradition

Plato's dismissal of traditional authority and established legal precedents in favor of governance based on intelligence points to a deeper philosophical debate about the role of tradition in society. He argues that:

26. **Intelligence vs. Custom:** Although he advocates for policy direction through intelligence, he acknowledges that often, society is bound by customs and traditions that may not always reflect rational governance.

Assessment of Errors

Analysis of Human Nature

One of the principal critiques of Plato's philosophy centers on his interpretation of human nature. Key aspects of this critique include:

27. **Desire for Security:** While security is a fundamental desire for many, Plato may have overestimated its appeal, underestimating the importance of freedom.
28. **Importance of Freedom:** The struggle for freedom throughout human history highlights a significant oversight in Plato's philosophy. His limited recognition of the need for freedom, particularly as seen with the introduction of the Nocturnal Council, demonstrates a tension between governance and individual autonomy.

Reality of Human Behavior

Ultimately, Plato's understanding of humanity is called into question. He may have misjudged the general nature of people, suggesting that:

- **Misconceptions of Greed and Capability:** The assertion that most individuals are greedy or inept may not align with reality. Similarly, the notion that individuals are inherently good, as suggested by Marx, may also be an oversimplification.

In summary, while Plato's philosophical framework in *The Laws*, *The Statesman*, and *The Republic* offers profound insights into governance and societal organization, it is not without significant flaws. His emphasis on a knowledgeable elite to direct the state, along with a neglect of individual liberty and a potentially inaccurate understanding of human nature, invites ongoing debate and critique within philosophical discourse.