

# POLI 341: ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL POLITICAL THOUGHT

Session 4 – PLATO'S THORIES OF EDUCATION,  
COMMUNISM AND PHILOSOPHER KING

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# Session Overview

- Please note that the structure of the ideal state hinges on three pillars-these are justice, communism and education.
- It has been said that Plato's philosophy is as wide as the world and as deep as the sea. The purpose of education is to build up the character, behaviour and outlook of the individual so that he can fit into the ideal state.
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau has said that Plato's *Republic* is the greatest book on education ever written. Let us go through the concept of education now.
- Plato indicated that the system of education will build the positive attitudes that the citizens need in an ideal state. You must know that communism will remove all the factors that seek to undermine the effort of individuals to be good citizens.
- It is therefore recommended that in order to build a very solid individual capable of promoting an ideal state communism must also be taken seriously.
- Please remember that Plato's definition of the ideal state is just the government of the best. But without proper administration, the ideal state can never be ideal or the ideal can never be achieved.
- This explains why Plato places the philosopher king at the apex of the ideal state. Therefore we explain the concept of the philosopher king, examine why there is the contention that Plato favoured an authoritarian state, discuss the powers and functions and criticisms which have been levelled against the philosopher king.

# Session outline

This session covers the following topics:

- The Purpose and Plan of Education
- Communism
- The Philosopher King

TOPIC ONE

# The Purpose and Plan of Education

# The Purpose of Education

- Education according to Plato was mental medicine. It has a unique function of removing evil and malady from the mind.
- It reforms the mind and broadens the whole outlook. Wrong ways of life are arrested by education.
- Education helps man and particularly his soul to be fully acquainted with the environment.
- Education teaches man to act with a definite purpose.
- Plato indicated that education should be state-controlled.
- Education controlled by private individual will not serve its real purpose.
- The primary object of education is to turn the eye to the light.
- Plato is inferring that the function of education is not to put knowledge into the soul, but to bring out the best things that are latent in the soul.
- Education teaches that the soul is sometimes ill-nurtured and ill-trained and education places it on a proper footing.

# Plan for Education

- Plato called education, the one great thing. If the citizens are well educated they will readily see through the difficulties that beset them and meet emergencies as they arise.
- Plato's plan for education || as for a state-controlled system of compulsory education.
- Rousseau said that the book was hardly a political work at all, but was the greatest work on education ever written.

# Plan for Education

- If virtue is knowledge, it can be taught and the educational system to teach it is the one indispensable part of a good state.
- Plato believed that the only salvation for states lay in the exercise of trained intelligence.
- If the purpose of education is the development of the soul, then the growth of the soul can be divided into two stages- early stage (primary education) and later stage (higher education).

# Primary Education

- The plan for elementary education was rather a reform of existing practice and an innovation.
- It consists of combining the training usually given to the son of an Athenian gentleman with state-controlled training given to a youthful Spartan and in revising drastically the content of both.
- The curriculum was divided into two parts. It includes gymnasium for the training of the body and music. It includes poetry, song and dance.
- The elementary training revolved around poetry and literature.
- According to Plato, education of the young is very important.



# Primary Education ; co-t'

- He says that the degree is the most important part of a work, especially in the case of a young and tender thing; for that the time at which the character is being formed and the desired impression is more readily taken.
- The young should learn art, literature and rudiments of science and figures.
- The attainment of eighteen years will qualify them to learn gymnastics whose purpose is to make them fit for the military and other assignments which requires strong and healthy physique.
- IY Plato's |ie|| , oYLJa watude dāaiY is Āapad'le of understanding the two subjects.
- The purpose of learning science and philosophy is to produce a guardian class.

# Higher Education

- The most original as well as the most characteristic proposal in the Republic is the system of higher education.
- A good system of education will ensure that the desired improvement is effected in the state.
- Once education is neglected, no good can be expected of the state.
- The state cannot leave education in private hands, or should education be commercialized.
- Education does not pay dividend in cash, it improves physical, mental and moral souls of the citizens.
- The higher education of the guardians was in purpose professional.

# Higher Education ;coÿt'ð

- The subjects included mathematics, astronomy, and logic, providing the needed foundation for the study of philosophy.
- Plato maintained that it is only with the help of the study of arithmetic that the intelligence can be sharpened and this helps attainment of pure truth.
- Beside the study of arithmetic, the study of geometry, astronomy and logic was necessary.
- He argued that the study of geometry makes easier the idea of the good.
- He insists that any student, who fails to grasp the idea of philosophy, will be eliminated.
- Plato's treatise of education the compulsory state-controlled scheme was a counter to the democratic custom in Athens.

# Evaluation of Plato's Concept of Education

- Plato's theory of education is fascinating in many respects.
- His scheme of higher education is really innovating.
- In the twenty-first century, we recognise the importance of science.
- It is important to note that more than 2,400 years ago, Plato recommended the study of science for the growth of society.
- Again, in many countries, education is state-controlled.
- Plato recommended that since education does not yield dividend in cash, it should be controlled by the state.
- It is also interesting to state that Plato realised that the purpose of education is the balanced growth of both the mind and the body.
- He insisted that the study of gymnastics and music is important for the balance of both the mind and the body.

TOPIC TWO

# COMMUNISM

# Communism defined

- Plato always argued that the organic conception of the state meant that the individual is an integral part of it.
- Similarly, the self is an integral part of the whole order.
- The individual has no scope to satisfy his personal and selfish desires remaining away from the whole social order.
- Fulfilment of selfish desires does not find place in Plato's system.
- Plato believed that personal property was a potent instrument to satisfy selfish desires.
- Plato's theory of communism takes the form of abolition of property and the prohibition of permanent monogamous sexual relation. These are explained in turn.

# Communism in Property

- First, the prohibition of private properties whether houses, land or money to the rulers and the provision that they shall live in barracks and have their meals at a common table.
- Communism was limited only to the guardian class.
- In the *Republic* Plato argued that true education will have the greatest tendency to civilise and humanise the rulers and the soldiers in their relation to one another and to those who are under their control.
- None of them should have Private property beyond what is absolutely necessary; neither should they have a private house.
- Their provisions should be only such as are required by trained warriors.
- They should agree to receive from the citizens a fixed rate of pay, enough to meet the expenses of the year.
- But should they ever acquire homes or lands or moneys of their own, they will become housekeepers and husbandmen instead of guardians, enemies and tyrants instead of allies of other citizens.

# The Implications of Communism in Property

- Please Note that Plato's Dept of Communism has important implications.
- First, Plato's argument of Communism is ethical. He argues that if a ruler engages in satisfying his personal and selfish desires that would be quite unethical on his part.
- Second, by advocating for communism of property for the ruling class, Plato wanted to separate economic power from political power, because the fusion of the two powers will lead to corruption and mismanagement.
- Thirdly, by recommending communism of property to the ruling class, Plato wants to set a very high example which will be unique in all respect.
- Finally, Plato's exposition of Communism is a distinctive.



# The Prohibition of Permanent Monogamous Sexual Relations

- The seDōŸd ĐŵpoŸeŸt of Plato's ĐŸĐept of ĐŵŵuŸisŸŵ is the prohibition of permanent monogamous sexual relation and the substitution of regulated breeding.
- Family life was abolished by Plato because he regards family affection, directed toward particular persons, as another potent rival to the state.
- AŸdžtŁ of oŸe's ĐhildđeŸ is a fodŸŵ of self-seeking more insidious than the desire for property, and the training of children in private homes he regards as a poor preparation for the whole-souled devotion.
- IŸ the faŸwilŁsŁsteŸŵ, a ŸwaŸ's fičst loŁłaltŁ is to his || i fe aŸd children.
- Finally, the abolition of marriage and subsequently family life by Plato was the criticism of the existing of women.

TOPIC THREE

# THE PHILOSOPHER KING

# The rationale for the Institution of the Philosopher King

- Plato believed that there is a sense in which a people need saving from themselves.
- He believes that if one follows the desires of the desirous part, it would bring one into conflict with others.
- The desirous part always wants more and this will eventually degenerate.
- There are even cases where people are deaf to their own reason and then one should step in hence the importance of the Philosopher King.
- The only way the society can develop is to ensure that the best rules the rest.

# Plato and authoritarianism

- It has been argued that Plato favoured authoritarian rule.
- The impression that Plato favoured an authoritarian state is derived from two sources.

These are:

- First, Plato clearly believes that government should not be left to just anyone, but to the experts.
- Secondly, because of the rigidity of the state, it is supposed to come into being at a stroke, rather than evolving through consensus over a period of time.

# The Functions and Powers of the Philosopher King

- The following statement in the Republic captures vividly the functions and  $\hat{Y}$ atude of the philosophed  $\bar{k}i\hat{Y}g$ . ***until the philosophers are kings or kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosopher, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one and those common natures who pursue either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never have rest from their evils . . . and then only will this our state have a possibility of life and behold the light of the day”***
- The Philosopher King has the following specific functions and powers:
- First, the Philosopher king must study the mind of his subjects and take care of them.
- Second, the philosopher king must seek the good relation among the citizens.
- Thirdly, the PK has absolute power and absolute discretion in his rule.
- Finally, it is a privilege of the sovereign to make full use of lies and deceit.
  - He states that  $\bar{i}t$  is the  $\bar{d}usi\hat{Y}ess$  of the  $\bar{d}ule\bar{d}s$  of the  $\bar{D}i\bar{L}J$  to tell lies,  $de\bar{D}ei|i\hat{Y}g$   $\bar{d}’o\bar{t}h$  the enemies and his own citizens for the benefit of the city and no one else must touch this  $\bar{p}\bar{d}i|i\bar{l}e\bar{g}e$ .
  - He must, however, punish people who lie because such people endanger the city- state.

# The Functions and Powers of the Philosopher King ;coÿt'ð

- You need to know that there are two important aspects of ideal state-philosopher king and justice.
- If the king is not philosopher the ideal principles will never be realised.
- The King will not look after his personal gains and interest, glory and power.
- The philosopher king is so important that without this important element, the state will be extremely bad.
- Greatness, wisdom, self-sacrifice are, exceptional qualities that the philosopher king has to study the mind of the people.
- The philosopher king is a god with human features .

# The Functions and Powers of the Philosopher King

- The philosopher king has certain prohibitions. These include:
- First, the Philosopher King must not own property.
- Second, he cannot have a wife and children.
- In the face of these prohibitions, is it possible for the Philosopher King to be happy?
- Plato answers in the affirmative and points out that the training will make him happy and prevent him from becoming a tyrant.
- Education will nurture the innate love for the city-state.
- The philosophic nature demands courage, good memory, magnanimity, quickness to learn, and above all, a consuming love of truth.

# Criticisms of the Philosopher King

- First, the fact of education nurturing people to be so selfless as to rule without abuse of power is untenable.
- Second, a government by a self-perpetuating minority of experts is in any case undesirable and undemocratic.
- Thirdly, it false to assume that one person, the philosopher king, will have all the knowledge to enable him finds solutions to all our problems.
- Fourthly, human beings also have moral problems.



# Criticisms of the Philosopher King ;coYt'Ø

- Fifthly, it is difficult to combine true philosophy with that of ruling.
- Finally, the modern liberal view is that all people know what is best for them; they are responsible for themselves and should be allowed a very large measure of self-determination.
- Social conditioning is a valuable tool in every state.
- It is true that all societies need some social engineering.
- All states have aims and objectives to fulfil and therefore overhasty condemnation of Plato on this score may well be a case of sinners casting the first stone.