

**Part - 2**

**Plato: A Totalitarian or Democratic? An Analysis**

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**Abstract**

This paper explores Plato's philosophical inquiries, focusing on his dialogues and their impact on Western thought. It examines key themes such as justice, virtue, and the ideal state. Political philosophy in *The Republic* is discussed, including the role of philosopher-kings. Ethical dimensions of Plato's works are considered, emphasizing moral realism. The relationship between metaphysics and epistemology in Plato's thought is explored. The paper also addresses critiques of Plato's ideas and their modern interpretations. Ultimately, it reaffirms Plato's enduring relevance in contemporary philosophy. The relevance of Plato's work in contemporary philosophy and politics is highlighted.

**Keywords:** scheme of education, philosopher king / queen, theory of justice , three souls , three classes, democracy , totalitarian.

**Introduction:**

Previously, in the paper "plato: a totalitarian or democratic?" , it was briefly discussed why plato is not totalitarian. A brief summary is given below:

The paper explores whether plato's political philosophy leans towards totalitarianism or democracy. While some scholars, like karl popper, criticize plato for being anti-democratic and an enemy of the open society, the author presents counter arguments to challenge this perspective.

Plato's political theory does not promote coercion, military control, or authoritarian measures. Instead, he emphasizes education, justice, and the philosopher-king's role in ruling with wisdom and virtue. His **theory of justice** aims at establishing a balanced and moral society, contradicting the idea of a totalitarian regime.

Additionally, plato advocates for education for all, including women and artisans, setting him apart from other philosophers like aristotle. His philosopher-king, trained in philosophy, politics, and administration, is expected to serve the welfare of the state selflessly, without attachment to wealth or power.

The paper concludes that Plato is neither strictly totalitarian nor democratic. While his ideas may suggest authority, they primarily focus on the **ideal state**, justice, and enlightenment. Regardless of his stance, Plato's contributions to political philosophy remain significant and influential.

This paper discusses the above suggested aspects in detail and provides a comprehensive analysis and explanation of the same. Scheme of education , theory of justice , theory of philosopher king \ queen and Plato's views on democracy are elucidated below.

### **Scheme of education**

One cannot fail to be astonished at the amount of space Plato has devoted to education in the book the "*republic*." Rousseau posits that the book was the greatest work on education ever written. Plato believed that most of the evils could be removed by providing proper education. The idea of education is connected to the ideal of the state. The objective of education is to turn the soul towards light. Plato once stated that the main function of education is not to put knowledge into the soul , but to bring out the latent talents in the soul by directing it towards the right object.

Plato believed in a strong state-controlled education, so that no one is deprived of education . Plato holds that education is the only instrument through which justice could be established in an ideal state.

Plato has given a detailed curriculum of this compulsory system of education for both sexes. It was divided into two stages, called the **elementary education** and **higher education**. This distinction is based on age differences and on class differences. Elementary education is the training of the youth and the military class. Higher education is the training of the middle age. It is the training of the ruling classes or guardians.

### **Elementary Education**

1. **First stage** - up to the age of six, the child should learn simple truths, good manners and also learn to love. Elementary education begins with training in music.
2. **Second stage** - in the second stage of elementary education, from 6 to 18 years , it will be supplemented by music for the soul or mind and gymnastics for the body.this education is both physical and intellectual. Gymnastics comprises bodily exercise , diet and medicine and music includes literature, poetry,singing and all fine arts.  
temperance , grace , rhythm, and harmony penetrates in the soul through music and gymnastics hardens the muscles . Both should be harmoniously blended so that the child may neither be too rough nor too soft.
3. **Third stage** - from the age of 13 to 20 years, there was to be given an exclusive training in gymnastics and military service in order to prepare them for the defence of the country.

### **Higher education**

- a. **First test** - at the age of twenty years , an elimination test will take place and the less

talented will drop off and form the class of artisans while the more promising will undergo another ten years of education. This stage is mainly for guardian class. Its aim is to make the selected few to become the guardians or rulers of the state.

- b. **Second test** - at the age of 30, a second selective test will be held. The less gifted will be made subordinate officers and the blessed one will undergo another five years of training .
- c. **Practical education** - after the age of 35, the guardians occupy the positions of authority in the state to get the practical experience through dealing with the real time problems. Education does not stop here, according to plato , it is a life- long process.

Plato's education comprises three core parts that is **development of mind , body and soul**. The development of the mind is done through education. This aspect of education aims to develop critical thinking , logical reasoning and better understanding of matter. Mathematics, geometry, astronomy and dialectics are integral parts of this intellectual education. Through the study of these subjects, one can be more analytical and problem solver and can acquire a comprehensive understanding of the world.

Then comes the development of the body because a healthy mind resides in a healthy body. In order to be intellectual and analytic , the health of the body should be perfect. This is why gymnastics and military services are kept mandatory in the platonic scheme of education. It aims to instill self-control and discipline in the individual.

Third and the foremost objective is the development of soul and realization of truth. Education for plato, is a search for truth. It includes artistic education which focuses on cultivating sensibility and creativity of individuals. Plato believed that exposure to music , poetry and other forms of art could shape the moral character of the students and encourage emotional expression, empathy ,temperance and harmony.

Plato's educational framework emphasizes dialogue and questioning , with the aim of encouraging critical thinking and self - reflection.

#### **Relevance in modern times**

The theory of education holds a significant relevance in contemporary times in many ways. It serves as a model for countries to adopt and base their present education system on. There can be seen many similarities in the education system of countries , especially india, with the platonic education scheme.

One such similarity is the scheme of state-funded compulsory education and government school as stated by plato . It is highly practiced and applied in india . Plato suggested a strong state controlled education in the state so that everyone could get proper education and the education can inculcate the values of civic virtues. India also follows the same scheme by providing the government schools and colleges to students.

Second, the right of children to free and compulsory education act , passed in 2009 by the government of india , provides every child in the age bracket of 6-14, the right to education in proper schools with trained and educated teachers.

This same concept of compulsory education is also enunciated by plato ages ago.

Thirdly, as we all know, the literacy rate in india is far from being impressive. Plato's scheme of education is a pre-meditated, fit-all plan, where everything is decided from the start and no choice is given to the individuals. In my opinion, this pre-meditated plan is the need for an hour in the country like india where the increase in the education ratio is more important than providing choices to individuals

The most proximate example of plato's theory of education in india, is reflected in the union public service commission examination, conducted every year. It is conducted to select a few capable bureaucrats in india. The candidates go through rigorous preparation and are required to have a certain mental, intellectual and emotional level of intelligence to be able to crack the exam. Only about 1000 candidates are selected from over two lakh applications. This process is the same as the one plato suggested in his scheme of education where at every level, candidates need to pass the test for further study and training, and if he fails to do so, then he would remain in the present class and work according to the class he belongs to.

Hence, it can be concluded that plato suggested a balanced and highly competitive and fair curriculum of education. Plato's theory of education is truly innovative. It can be said that education has not lost its importance in plato's time to the present time. His idea of the importance of education is not lost in contemporary times; rather it is used as a tool of revolution and primarily considered as a stepping stone to a better life. he was probably the first feminist who wanted to impart the same kind of knowledge to both boys and girls. He believed that there was no difference in kind between the native capabilities of boys and girls.

Therefore, the system of education outlined above was meant to produce a selfless, highly intellectual and well- trained ruler.

#### **Philosopher king / queen**

Plato's theory of philosopher king / queen is significant to understand his political thought. The theory of philosopher king / queen was the linchpin of plato's ideal state. Plato took the idea from socrates, defined king as one who loved wisdom, had a passion for knowledge, was always curious and eager to learn. Plato believed that the ruler should be highly educated, trained and an intellectual person who knows the act of ruling. Those who have philosophical knowledge can master political power and thus rule. For plato, the ideal state ruled by the philosopher king was the divine institution perfectly worthy of emulation. Plato wanted to establish a just society and a "just" state is the one ruled by a philosopher and the political knowledge they must have is the knowledge of how to maintain the division of labour, as this is the necessary condition for ideal society and thus for the appropriate ordering of virtues within the society.

An educated ruler who is trained to work for the public interest would never become a tyrant. He is well aware of the conditions and problems of the society, its people and knows how to resolve them. Only philosopher kings could possess true knowledge and rule an ideal state where all citizens are happiest. Philosopher king is the highly virtual man of the society

and hence is capable of attaining the ideal state which plato talks about.

Plato's philosopher king should work for the welfare of its people and state and detach himself from all worldly affairs and materialistic possessions like property, wealth and family. Plato imposed strict control over education, family, and property and living arrangements of the philosophic kings to ensure that the ruler did not become self-serving, imperious and dictatorial. The concept of communism of wives and property is applied to them, suggesting that a king should not have a family, wife and children, and property, this way he would only think and work for the people of his country, rather than for himself and his family. This would also mitigate the corruption in the political system and the rulers would selflessly be devoted to the country and its welfare.

Plato did not discriminate between two sexes. He provided education to both sexes and both men and women are eligible to rule the society.

Plato argues that "there is no end to the troubles of state ... .humanity itself, till philosophers become the kings of the world.. And political power and philosophy thus come into the same hands."

Although plato's theory is fascinating, it has many shortcomings too.

in the words of aristotle, plato's disciple and the biggest critic, "plato is sacrificing good for the sake of best, but the best is unachievable. If the rule of the philosopher king is best, the rule of law is best practical."

The main flaw of this theory is that plato suggested a philosopher to be a ruler but could not explain how this knowledge would be beneficial for the ruler to rule efficiently. It is basically a benevolent dictatorship, nothing more than that. Another criticism attached to it is that plato denied participation of the ordinary people in the decision making and legislative processes, preventing the ideal state from dissent and opposition.

The most dreadful critique of this theory lies in the concept of communism of wife and property. Plato wanted a ruler to be devoid of personal feelings and relationships with family which is an inhumanely thing plato wanted from his philosophic king.

### **Theory of justice**

Plato's most famous and valued theory is the theory of justice written in the "*republic*." the word republic itself means justice in greek. This theory was elaborated in a detailed manner by plato. In the greek language, the word 'dikaioσύνη' means righteousness or just. Therefore, plato's concept of justice was based on morals and ethics, not on legal sanctions. For him, justice is reflected by doing one's duty and contributing to society, according to the virtues possessed. Plato emphasizes more on duty aspects of the citizen.

Justice, according to plato, is the fourth cardinal virtue, followed by wisdom, courage and temperance. An ideal state possesses these four cardinal virtues. Justice would prevail in the society when everyone does their duty for which they are best suited for and not interfere in other's duty. Justice is functional specialization. Each unit of society performs its specific task. Thus different demands of society develop interdependence. This interdependence

results in cohesiveness in the society.

plato hence propagated the theory of three souls and the theory of three classes.

- **Three souls**- the theory posits that there are three different kinds of souls which exist in people - reason , spirit and desire/appetite .
- **Three classes** - based on the souls , the society is divided into three different classes , i.e., ruling class or the class of philosopher king/ queen , auxiliary class and the artisans.

Soul	Interest	Class	Virtue
Reason	Knowledge	Philosophers	Wisdom
Spirit	Honor	Warriors	Courage
Desire	Pleasures	Commoners	Temperance

Plato believed that there are three traits of human nature, present in the 3 cavities of the human body , that is , the **cranial cavity** , holding the quality of knowledge. The men included in this class are called **men of gold**. The reason and the virtue of wisdom is possessed by the ruler class who gain extensive knowledge and rule the society. Justice is a virtue, as is knowledge, which requires understanding. Understanding refers to goodness, and thus, knowledge and goodness are one. The philosopher kings have virtue as they have knowledge, and thus, according to plato, their rule is justified. The philosopher king occupies the highest position of authority. He becomes an epitome of virtue and wisdom , guiding the state towards justice and harmony.

The second cavity is the **thoracic cavity**, and people included here are considered **men of silver**. The spirit and the virtue of courage or bravery is possessed by the warriors as they have to protect the state. They are the second highest class in platonic theory of justice .plato assigned them the duty to protect and secure the state from external harms and provide security. The philosopher king / queen class and the auxiliary class both constitute a class called the **guardian class**.

The last soul is the soul of appetite and the virtue of temperance is possessed by the class of artisans. This is enunciated in the third cavity that is **abdominal cavity**, which has potential for avarice. This class is given all the tasks related to economy, finance , farming , trading , etc. Here, they are considered the **men of iron**.

### **Principles of justice**

This theory of justice works on three main principles:

1. **the principle of division of labour** - the society is divided into 3 classes according to the virtues dominated. This division is important to avoid chaos in the society and maintain balance . This division of labour has to be ensured by the philosopher king / queen.
2. **The principle of non- interference** - the principle of non-interference has to be followed by the citizens of the society. No one should interfere in anyone's duty. Only the

assigned duties are to be fulfilled by people. This non interference would ensure compatibility and balance in the society.

**The principle of specialization** - the duties are assigned according to the virtue, the skills and the knowledge a person possesses. For example, the duty to rule the society is given to the ruler who have highest cognition and goodness, the warriors are assigned to protect the society because they are brave and courageous whereas the trading and economic affairs are given to the artisan class because they possess the soul of desires and have to maintain temperance or self control. This is called specialization, which plato suggested. He drew a parallel between three social classes and the three elements of the human soul. Each soul has a corresponding social class.

Therefore, the fulfillment of these three virtues namely wisdom, bravery and temperance, ensures the fourth virtue that is justice. When these four cardinal virtues are fulfilled then only the ideal society can be accomplished.

wisdom + courage + temperance = justice

#### **Plato's view on democracy**

Democracy originates from a greek word “**demokratia**” where ‘demos’ means people and ‘kratos’ means rule, combining together it refers to a system of government where people possess the power to rule. This term signifies a system of government where the principle of sovereignty, equality, and liberty is practiced and the power vests in the hands of the populace. The government is elected through a transparent voting process conducted by the citizens of the nation. It is considered as the best possible form of government in current times.

But when we observe the democracy existed in ancient times, it was marked distinct and far from being the best possible, rather it was perceived as corrupt, highly unstable, perverted and the worst form of governance. Plato is probably the first philosophical critique of democracy and comes in sharp opposition with democracy. He detests democracy and favoured aristocracy over democracy.

Plato believed that democracy is a corrupt form of government which provides excessive freedom to the rulers which in turn exploits the society and its citizens. In democracy, everyone has the right to rule, which affects the capability of the efficient person to rule.

For plato, democracy is a denial of the principle of qualifications. It holds that every citizen has a right to participate in the government; but a right must correspond to capacity, and plato believed that the average person has neither the knowledge nor the intelligence requisite for governance. Plato wanted a philosopher to be a king so that the society is governed by sound and intellectual mind, not by coercion and corruption. Moreover, the condemnation of plato’s teacher socrates to death, further intensified the hatred towards this government system.

Condemning democracy, in his book the “*republic*”, plato said “the laws of democracy remain a dead letter, its freedom is anarchy, its equality, the equality of unequals.”

Plato’s most famous critique of democracy is epistemic : the ruler ought to be

knowledgeable and most of the people lack both knowledge and ability to identify the knowledgeable people. In the republic, it is the philosopher-king who possesses the knowledge of forms, and because of this knowledge, he can rule well. On this basis, plato was considered an epistocrat.

Democracy does not provide unity to the state, but a haphazard mess. It is the breeding ground for tyranny. It utterly lacks order, provides freedom to all as a licence to do what one wants, treats people equally making no distinctions between skill, worth and merit. (*plato on democracy, jeremy reid*)

Plato believed that democracy often leads to chaos and disorder due to unrestricted freedom to individuals. He argued that it could result in the rule of the unqualified majority, leading to decisions driven on emotions rather than reason. Plato considered democracy a flawed system of government because it promotes self-interest and personal gains over common goods. He posits that democracy's focus on individual rights overlooks the communal duties and societal well being.

For plato, the best form of constitution is the mixture of the principle of monarchy and the principle of democracy.

#### **Is plato totalitarian ?**

It is clear from the above discussion that plato is definitely not a supporter of democratic institutions. So does this fact posit that plato is totalitarian ? The intent to write this paper is to clear that if plato is not democratic that does not signify that he was a totalitarian. Karl popper, and other critics have pointed out that plato is a pro-totalitarian, his work is the notion of dictatorship. But plato was neither a totalitarian nor a democratic philosopher. He did not favoured democracy due to various genuine reasons but he also didn't favoured or established a totalitarian society. So far we have learned how plato wanted a society to be. He wanted a well educated, trained and eager to learn and skilled philosophic-ruler who is the best possible ruler for the establishment of an ideal society. He wanted education for all and a just society with proper balance between three different classes. Nowhere we have seen or hinted that plato wanted a totalitarian society or promoted a totalitarian society. Rather he wanted a society which can work for the welfare of its people and achieve the status of an ideal state. He wanted a society to be perfect in every aspect.

In platonic doctrine, the absence of any reference to military force or coercion signifies plato's aversion to totalitarian methods. His vision encompassed a harmonious society characterized by a clear delineation of roles and a fundamental principle of non-interference. While some may speculate that plato leaned towards a democratic ideology, his critiques of democratic governance suggest otherwise. Plato's disenchantment with democracy stemmed from the tragic fate of his mentor socrates, whose life was claimed by the very system plato found fault with.

Plato's disdain for democracy emanated from his belief that it fosters corruption by granting excessive liberties to its leaders, resulting in the exploitation of both society and its populace. On the other hand, plato was against totalitarianism too. He provides more than adequate education to its philosophic-ruler so that he does not wander over self-interested goals



and solely work for its society and people. Moreover, if plato had intended to establish a totalitarian society, he would have likely proposed coercive measures such as a militaristic or authoritarian regime, oppressive regulations, and stringent laws.

Plato's philosophical views on governance and societal structure were deeply rooted in his concern for the well-being of the state and its citizens. While he criticized democracy for its potential for corruption and exploitation, he also recognized the dangers of totalitarianism and the need for a balanced approach. Plato's concept of an ideal society, as depicted in his work "**the republic**," emphasized the importance of education, especially for the ruling class, to ensure that leaders prioritize the common good over self-interest.

In plato's vision, a philosopher-king would undergo rigorous education and training to develop virtues such as wisdom, justice, and temperance. By cultivating these qualities, the ruler would be better equipped to make decisions that benefit the entire society rather than serving personal ambitions. This emphasis on moral and intellectual development aimed to prevent the abuse of power and promote the harmonious functioning of the state.

Furthermore, plato's rejection of totalitarian measures highlights his belief in the importance of individual freedom and autonomy within a structured society. Rather than advocating for oppressive control or authoritarian rule, plato's ideal governance model sought to strike a balance between order and liberty, with an emphasis on ethical leadership and the pursuit of the common good.

### **Conclusion**

Plato , a dazzling writer, great philosopher, and an idealist of greek, who's contribution in the field of political philosophy is tremendous. His understanding of state and concept of justice, government system , property and education is different and idealistic from that of later emerged thinkers. He is one of the most penetrating and wide ranging prolific authors in the history of philosophy.

plato's social and political thought especially in the "*republic*" holds philosophy a true power - a philosopher knows the forms and ideals , guided by reason and knowledge , hence is fit to rule. Platonic justice is based on the assumption that duties are more important than rights , the division of labour into three classes based on virtues possessed by them, should strictly be balanced with functional specialization and non - interference.

The scheme of education as enunciated by plato gives everyone the right to acquire education based on their capabilities. The concept of education in plato's philosophy goes beyond mere academic learning; it encompasses the development of individuals based on their innate abilities. Plato's emphasis on creating a corruption-free educational system highlights his belief in the importance of a just and equitable society . Plato, being a perfectionist, established a corruption free administration through the device of communism of wives and property. A ruler can only work selflessly when there are no incentives and personal gains like expansion of wealth and property involved .plato aimed to eliminate personal interests and selfish motivations that could hinder the pursuit of knowledge and

wisdom.

Plato meticulously formed his platonic theory so that the abstract , perfect ideal state can be achieved. Plato had stated that the he suggested the notion of ideal state , not to actually establish such a perfect state , as it is impossible to establish, rather he suggested the idea of ideal state so that the actual states can consider this ideal state as model and become a best possible state to exist having justice, virtues, knowledge, a wisdom ruler , stable government, common welfare and dutiful citizens.

Plato was the first philosopher who condemned democracy and concluded that democracy brings tyranny, dictator and demagogues to power. He preferred aristocracy as a better form of government than democracy. For him, it is a rule of reason and a polity in which the interests of all are safeguarded by the exceptional intelligence of few. Therefore , he suggested the mixture of monarchy and democracy as the best possible form of constitution so that neither the monarchy nor the democracy would be in its extreme form.

Concluding , plato was considered the greatest teacher and idealist by his admirers while an enemy to open society , a totalitarian and anti - democratic by his critiques. Nevertheless , plato gave western political thought a vision , and a direction.

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