

Paper Name: Western Political Thought

Paper Code : 18BPO53C

Class : BA Third Year

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Unit 1

1.1 Plato

- He authored the book Republic
- The book was quintessentially about Justice and therefore its another title was **Concerning Justice**
- Plato uses the famed Greek Method of Dialectics
- Dialectics is the knowledge route to arrive at the destination of Truth through the journey of debates and discussions
- Plato was the student of Socrates and Teacher of Aristotle

Major Topics

The major topics of the Platonic thought are

- A) Theory of Justice
- B) Theory of Philosopher Rule
- C) Theory of Education
- D) Theory of Communism

A) Theory of Justice

He analyses Justice at two levels

1. Individual level

2. Societal level

He famously argued **Society is individual writ large**. Individual magnification is society

-Justice at Individual level

Individual possesses three major organs

1. Head
2. Shoulders
3. Stomach

-Head contains brain and therefore represents decision making centre

- Shoulders signify physical strength and therefore should carry out administrative and military responsibilities
- The stomach is associated with food consumption and nutrition
- Individual Level Justice demands that stomach and shoulders must listen to Brain

-Societal Justice

Society is Individual Writ Large

Society has three classes of people

1. Class with Intellectual Strength
2. Class with Physical Strength
3. Others
4. Intellectual Class should rule. The second group should carry out administrative and military responsibilities. The third class should carry out agriculture and trade and support the other two classes.

-Key Features

1. Feature of Harmony

As each class concentrates on its clearly defined duty there will be harmony among them

2. Feature of Non-interference

3. Feature of Functional Specialization

-Critical Evaluation

Many ideologies and thinkers strongly criticize Platonic Theory of Justice.

Liberalism and Marxism castigate Plato for injecting inequality among human beings.

Karl Popper, one of the most important thinkers of Libertarianism in his book 'Open Society and Its Enemies' described Plato as the first enemy of open society.

Individual has been sacrificed on the altar of society

B) Rule of the Philosopher King

- The ideal state of Plato is the Rule of the Philosopher King
- Philosopher alone should rule as he alone possess knowledge and wisdom

Why Philosophers?

- Normal monarchs will seek limited goods like territory and wealth and therefore strife and wars are inevitable.

- The Philosophers will seek unlimited goods like wisdom and knowledge and therefore their rule will herald development not disaster and destruction
- The Philosopher possess knowledge about the Idea of the Good or Form. He understands the universal, fundamental and immutable Reality because of which his rule will be beneficial for all human beings and biological forms
- Philosophers should rule as he is lover of knowledge and seeker of wisdom
- Rule of Law is rejected by Plato. Philosopher will rule on the basis of law but wisdom. When we fall sick we take the medicine the doctor prescribes. The patients do not tell the doctor which medicine to take.
- Plato is also against democracy. He calls it as the rule of the illiterate and the foolish people. The enlightened Philosopher alone should rule
- **Limitations and conditions**

There are certain conditions that philosophers should abide by

- a) Education system should not be changed
- b) Population growth should not go beyond a certain threshold level
- c) Communism of Property for the ruling class should not be violated

Critical Evaluation

Plato establishes absolutism by rejecting Rule of Law and Democracy. Karl Popper, the noted philosopher of Libertarianism in his Open Society and its Enemies had described Plato as the first enemy of open society. Plato's ideal rule is impractical. When he was offered the opportunity of ruling over an island for one year Plato could not deliver the results

Comment on the Following

There will be no end to the troubles of states, or of humanity itself, till philosophers become kings in this world, or till those we now call kings and rulers really and truly become philosophers, and political power and philosophy thus come into the same hands.

C) Education

Objective

- Plato provides a comprehensive scheme of education in his book Republic
- The purpose of education is the promotion of Justice (both individual and societal) through the educational empowerment of Philosopher Rulers

General Features

- After a thorough examination of the two major and rival patterns of ancient education (Athenian and Spartan Schemes) Plato formulates his own scheme of education. He rejected the Athenian Education and preferred Spartan Education System
- The state should design the syllabus and provide education to the people
- Education is made mandatory by Plato
- Plato is in favor of education without gender discrimination. He never says that only men should get the access to education
- He was against including poetry in curriculum and he believed strongly that poetry inculcates falsehood among the minds of the impressionable youth
- It is a holistic education model taking care of physical, psychological aspects of development
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Stages of Education

- There are two stages of education in Platonic Philosophy of Education
 - a) Primary Education
 - b) Higher Education

Primary Education

- There are three sub stages in elementary education

a) 1 to 6 Years of Age

- The pupils here should be taught religion and language. Religious and moral truth must be imparted to them. They must acquire the linguistic capabilities

b) 7 to 18 Years

- The students should be taught music and gymnastics. Music leaning will result in the development of the soul and mind. Gymnastics will lead to physical development of the body.

c) 19 to 20 Years

- The students will be provided with military training. The objectives are to empower the youth with courage, stamina, fitness, discipline and self-control.

Higher Education

- The qualified students will be promoted to the next level of Higher education. There are two sub-phases here.

a) 21 TO 30 Years

- The students will learn science, logic and mathematics and astronomy in this period of a decade. For Plato the subject of mathematics is indispensable.

b) 30 to 35 Years

- The ultimate and most important state of the entire education philosophy of Plato lies in the last five years of the protracted duration. The students will be taught only one subject named the science of Dialectics. It refers to the ancient Greek methodology of debates to remove contradictions and to arrive at the truth.

Post Education Stage

- After the prolonged educational period of 35 years the meritorious student will be chosen to become the Philosopher Ruler. The entire purpose of the staggered education is to prepare the Philosopher Rulers. The rule will be for a duration of 15 years. Once the former student and present ruler reaches the age of fifty the period of retirement will come. Post-retirement the ruler must join the education system to train the future rulers

Critical Evaluation

- Educationists and philosophers have criticized the duration, content, objective and pattern of Platonic Philosophy of Education. It is very prolonged. Its objective is very limited and specific. It gives more importance to some subjects. It ignores subjects like poetry. It is more theoretical and less practical. It is very expensive

Comment on the following

Rousseau "Plato's *Republic* was the finest treatise ever written on education".

D) Communism

- Plato advocates communism in his Republic
- There are two kinds of communism in his scheme
 - a) Communism of Property
 - b) Communism of Family
- The objective of Communism is to promote Justice, the most cardinal principle of Platonic Thought

Communism of Property

- The basic purpose is promotion of Justice
- There should not be any private property for the guardian class as their concentration might be diverted to self-aggrandizement away from the paramount objective of Justice
- Their economic needs and necessities will be provided by the state
- Only the guardian class will not have private property and others engaged in production, commerce and trade will be allowed to possess private property

Communism of Family

- Plato advocates a revolutionary and unique mode of communism called as Communism of Family or Wives
- The Guardian class will not have the right of individual marriages (One man one woman marriage).
- They will have only group marriages
- The men born in a particular year will be husbands and women born in a different year will be wives
- The intelligent men will be allowed to have more wives and men without wisdom and knowledge will be denied marriage and other conjugal rights
- Children will be separated from parents immediately after birth. Plato does not allow biological recognition to both parents and children.

- There are **three objectives** for the Communism of Family
 - a) Promotion of Justice
 - b) Women Empowerment
 - c) Creation of A genetically superior human race

Critical Evaluation

The most debatable feature of Platonic thought is the nature and structure of communism. Many philosophers argue that platonic communism is impractical, inhuman. Discriminatory and even debasing. All stakeholders and shareholders of family life, husbands, wives, parents and children all are subjected to unusual torment and hardship

Comment on the following

- Plato is the first feminist of the western world

For Further Reading

1. *Republic by Plato*
2. *History of Political Theory by Holland Sabine*
3. *Western Political Thought by C.L.Wayper*
4. *Western Political Thought by Bookhives Publications*
5. Ebenstein William: Great Political Thinkers – Plato to Present, Oxford and IBH Publishing Co. New Delhi.
6. Sabine G., History of Political Theory, Oxford and IBH Publishing Co; New Delhi.
7. Gupta .R.C: The great political Thinkers; Lakshmi Narayan Agarwal, Agra.

1.2 Aristotle

- Aristotle is one of the greatest thinkers in the firmament of political thought
- He authored the book **Politics**
- He is often described as the Father of Politics
- He was indispensable as a pioneer in the development of many branches of knowledge in the western tradition
- He was a pupil of Plato and the tutor of Alexander

Ethical Concept of State

- Aristotle believes in the ethical notion of the state
 - He considers state as a moral and ethical institution
 - State is indispensable for the moral development of man
 - While describing the human nature of man he said that man is a social and political animal
 - He forms a series of associations as part of his social life
 - Family is the first and foremost institution
 - A group of families constitute a village and a group of villages constitute a city state
 - the social and political journey of man culminates in the formation of state
 - State exists to promote the ethical and moral development of man. Historically state came into being after many other social institutions
 - Notwithstanding the above fact individual can achieve his self-realization and moral development only because of and through the state
- Philosophers and thinkers have vehemently criticized the ethical notion of the state. Liberalism considers state as necessary evil. Marxism is quintessentially anti statist

Comment on the statements of Aristotle

1. "State is prior to the individual"

2. "There was no life for man outside the city-state into which he was born – neither a physical nor a moral existence independent of the community and the State. Man is born into, and lives his life as a citizen of, the State; and as such, he is subject to being regulated in the various aspects of his life by the laws and customs of the city-state into which he is an inseparable part."

Slavery

Aristotle supports the institution of slavery. Man needs animate beings and inanimate objects for his development. Among the animate beings slaves are important. Slaves are the people with physical strength but without intellectual caliber

Reasons

He provides three reasons in favour of slavery

1. **Nature:** There is no equality in nature. Inequality is the order of the day. Soul is more important than body
2. **Derivative Excellence:** Slavery is beneficial to both masters and slaves. Masters are freed from ordinary mundane work and they can pursue intellectual and ethical development. Slavery is useful to slaves too as they can achieve intellectual progress by being in association with masters
3. **Economy:** The Greek economy was heavily dependent on slavery for its operation and was practically the backbone

Safeguards

Aristotle provides many safeguards for slaves. His slavery concept cannot be equated with the slavery of the modern period

1. Prisoners of War should not be treated as slaves as defeat in war reveals superiority of physical strength and not intellectual caliber
2. Children should not be treated as slavery
3. Elderly people should not be treated as slaves
4. Slaves must be emancipated from slavery once they achieve intellectual empowerment

Critical evaluation

Slavery is repugnant with modern values. All leading ideologies reject slavery and focus on equality of human beings. Liberalism, Marxism, Socialism, Feminism and democracy all reject slavery. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations is emphatically against slavery. Indian constitution repudiates slavery by providing fundamental rights to all

Rule of the Middle Class

Aristotle supports the Rule of the Middle Class as the most favorable form of government.

There are three classes in the society.

1. Rich Class
2. Middle Class
3. Poor Class

Middle Class alone should rule. Any class aspiring to rule should possess two qualities. The ability of ruling over others and the ability to be ruled by others. The Rich Class possess the ability to rule over others but suffers from the inability to be ruled by others. The Poor Class possess the ability to be ruled by others but does not possess the ability of ruling over others. Only the Middle Class possess both the abilities connected with ruling and ruled.

Moreover the Middle Class is numerically more powerful. It is the single largest class in society. The other two classes cannot match either individually or in united form the numerical strength of the Middle Class

Critical Evaluation

The theory is not accepted by different thinkers and ideologies. A group of people exercise over others through their organizational unity, economic wealth, intellectual caliber and religious position even though numerically smaller.

Citizenship

-Aristotle expounds his concept of citizenship that is preponderantly influenced by the norms and values associated with citizenship.

- There are two kinds of criteria in defining citizenship

a) Primary Criteria

b) Secondary Criteria

Primary Criteria

- There are two fundamental qualifications for achieving citizenship. Any citizen must be a member of the deliberative institutions or judge of the courts. To achieve citizenship one must have eligibility to participate in the law making process or must be involved in adjudication of law in the judicial system

Secondary Criteria

- Aristotle allows many secondary qualifications to acquire citizenship. In fact what we in modern nation state visualize as main criteria of citizenship Aristotle lists as secondary factors
- He must be a resident in the territory of the state
- He must have the rights to trade in the territory
- He should be born to parents holding citizenship

Critical Evaluation

Aristotle's concept of Citizenship is suited to ancient political systems. There are not practical in modern nation state system that are mammoth entities in terms of territory and demography.

Property

- Aristotle militates against his teacher Plato and justifies the institution of Private Property
- Aristotle believes that property is important for life and development of individuals

Advantages of Property

- There are multiple benefits accruing from property
- It provides incentive to work hard
- The magic of private property converts sand into gold
- It creates security for the individual and his family
- It induces charity instincts and activities in the minds of the individuals
- It inculcates social responsibility

Ideal Property Rights Regime

- Aristotle classifies property right system into four kinds
 - a) Common ownership and Common Consumption
 - b) Common Ownership and Private Consumption
 - c) Private Ownership and Common Consumption
 - d) Private Ownership and Private Consumption
- Out of the above types the most favoured model is the Private Ownership and Common Consumption
- Properties must be privately owned but the goods and services must be commonly available.

Critical Evaluation

Aristotle is criticized for his perspectives on property. Platonic Communism is antithesis of his property rights. Marxism too repudiates his ideas.

Comment on the Following

1. "Leisure requires wealth so as to have the time to pursue and live a life of truth and virtue."
2. "How immeasurably greater is the pleasure, when a man feels a thing to be his own ... And further, there is the greatest pleasure in doing a kindness or service to friend and guests or companions, which can only be rendered when a man has private property."
3. "Property should be ... as a general rule, private; for when everyone has a distinct interest, men will not complain of one another and they will make progress, because everyone will be attending to his own business ..."
4. "When they till the ground together the question of ownership will give a world of trouble. If they do not share equally in enjoyments and toils, those who labor much and get little will necessarily complain of those who labor little and receive or consume much ..."

Aristotelian Classification of Governments

-Aristotle conducted a comparative study of more than 150 constitutions of the world and brings out a comprehensive classification of constitutions

- There are two kinds of criteria used by him in classification

a) Number of Rulers

b) Nature of Rule

- As far as the criterion of number of rulers is concerned there can be one or a few or many members

- As far as the second criterion is concerned the rule may be either good or bad

- **Classification of Governments**

SL.NO.	Number of Rulers	Nature of Rule	Name
1	One	good	Monarchy
2	One	Bad	Despotism
3	Few	Good	Aristocracy
4	Few	Bad	Oligarchy
5	Many	Good	Polity
6	Many	Bad	Democracy

Critical Evaluation

The positive aspect of Aristotelian Classification is its comparative and comprehensive nature. But the critics are displeased that he described Democracy as a bad, negative kind of government

For Further Reading

1. *Politics by Aristotle*
2. *History of Political Theory by Holland Sabine*
3. *Western Political Thought by C.L.Wayper*
4. *Western Political Thought by Bookhives Publications*
5. *Western Political Thought by J.P.Sudha*