

---

## UNIT 2 PLATO

---

### Structure

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Introducing Plato
  - 2.2.1 The Man and His Times
  - 2.2.2 His Works
  - 2.2.3 His Methodology
- 2.3 Philosophical Foundations of Plato's Political Theory
  - 2.3.1 Socratic Base
  - 2.3.2 Theory of Ideas
- 2.4 Political Philosophy of Plato
  - 2.4.1 Theory of Justice
  - 2.4.2 Scheme of Education
  - 2.4.3 Community of Wives and Property
  - 2.4.4 Ideal State: The Ruling Class/Philosophic Ruler
- 2.5 Evaluation of Plato's Political Theory
  - 2.5.1 Plato's Adversaries
  - 2.5.2 Plato's Place in Western Political Theory
- 2.6 Summary
- 2.7 Exercises

---

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

---

Plato (428/7-348/7 BC), a Greek philosopher, is one of the most creative influential thinkers in political philosophy. A great deal of writings on Plato has appeared from time to time. Some have described Plato as the real intellectual founder of Christianity, 'a Christian before Christ', while others, of Marxian socialism. With some, Plato is a revolutionary, a radical at that, with others, a reactionary, a fascist at that. Plato's modern critics include C.M. Bowra (*Ancient Greek Literature*, 1933), W. Fite (*The Platonic Legend*, 1934), R.H. Crossman (*Plato Today*, 1937), A.D. Winspear (*The Genesis of Plato's Thought*, 1940) and Karl Popper (*The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol. I, 1945). Plato's admirers include Roland R. Levinson (*In Defence of Plato*, 1953) and John Wild (*Plato's Modern Enemies and the Theory of Natural Law*, 1953). The descriptive and interpretative, and yet sympathetic account of Plato can be found in Ernest Barker (*Greek Political Theory: Plato and His Predecessors*, 1918) and Richard Lewis Nettleship (*Lectures on the Republic of Plato*, 1929). This is merely a brief reading of works on/about Plato intended to introduce the great philosopher.

Political philosophy in the West begins with the ancient Greeks and Plato, inheriting a rich tradition of political speculation became its first embodiment. Plato was an idealist, for he laid down the basis for political idealism in the West. He was a philosopher, for he had seen the forms beyond those which could be seen as appearances. He was a rationalist, for he gave his philosophy a definite vision. He was a revolutionary, for he attempted to build a new and novel fabric on the ruins of the society around. Obviously, in the process, Plato drifted away from the prevailing system, and was, thus, consequently damned as utopian, impracticable, idealist and the like.

Plato's place, in western political thought, would always remain unparalleled. Numerous idealists regard Plato as their teacher and they feel great in calling themselves his disciples. Some admire Plato while others condemn him, but none dare ignore him. It is here where Plato's greatness lies. He was, indeed, the idealist among the idealists, the artist among the artists, the philosopher among the philosophers, and the revolutionary among the revolutionaries.

---

## 2.2 INTRODUCING PLATO

---

### 2.2.1 The Man and His Times

Plato an aristocrat by both birth and temperament was born in democratic Athens, at a time when it was engaged in a deadly war against Sparta—the Peloponnesian War. The war lasted for about 28 years, and resulted in the fall of Athens. On his father's side, Plato traced his descent from Codrus, the last of the tribal kings of Athens, or even from the God Poseidon, and on the mother's side, from that of Solon, the great law-giver.

Plato was a child, when his father, Ariston, died, and his mother Perictione married Pyrilampes, an associate of Pericles, the statesman. As a young man, Plato had political ambitions, but he became a disciple of Socrates, accepting his basic philosophy and dialectical style of debate: the pursuit of truth through discussions and dialogues. In fact, Plato was disillusioned the way things were going around. He was invited to join public life when the Spartan puppet government, the Rule of Thirty, was established in 404 BC and where his maternal uncles, Critias and Charmides, were members of that group. Plato declined the offer, because he was disappointed by the functioning of political leadership, in general, and by his disgusting experiences of the two successive governments in particular, first by the Rule of Thirty, and later by the returned democratic faction, the former entrapping Socrates on charges of corrupting the youth, and the latter executing him on charges of impiety. All this convinced Plato that all politics are evil if not given proper management and direction. Plato himself writes in the *Seventh Letter*, supposed to be his autobiography, saying: "... eager though I had been at first to go into politics, as I looked at these things (the course of political life in the city-states) and saw everything taking any course at all with *no direction or management*, I ended by feeling dizzy. ... But at last I saw that as far all states *now existing are concerned, they are all badly governed*. For the condition of their laws is bad almost past cure, except for some miraculous accident. So, I was compelled to say, in praising true philosophy, that it was from it alone that one was able to discern all true justice, private as public. And so I said that *all the nations of men will never cease from private trouble until either the true and genuine breed of philosophers shall come to political office or until that of the rulers in the states shall by some divine ordinance take to the true pursuit of philosophy*". (Italic added)

After Socrates' execution in 399 BC, Plato, fearing for his own safety, and in all disillusionment, set himself for long travels temporarily abroad to Italy, Sicily and Egypt. In 388 BC, Plato, after his return to Athens, founded the *Academy*, the institution often described as the first European University. It provided a comprehensive curriculum, including such subjects as astronomy, biology, political theory, philosophy and mathematics, inscribing, on the very gate of the *Academy*, about mathematics: "Those having no knowledge of mathematics need not enter here."

• Pursuing an opportunity to combine philosophy and practical politics, Plato went to Sicily in 367 to tutor the new ruler of Syracuse, Dionysius, the younger, in the art of philosophical rule. The experiment failed. Plato made another attempt to Syracuse again, in 361 BC, but once

again, he met with a failure. The last years of **Plato's** life were spent **lecturing** at the Academy, and in writing. Plato died at about the age of 80 in Athens in 348 or 347 BC leaving the management of the Academy to Spepesippus, his nephew.

## 2.2.2 His Works

Plato's writings were in dialogue form, and the hero in all writings except in **the Laws** was **none** but his teacher, Socrates. In the dialogue-type writings, philosophical ideas were advanced, discussed, and criticised in the context of a conversation or debate **involving** two or more persons.

**The** collection of Plato's works includes 35 dialogues and 13 letters, though doubts are cast on the authenticity of a few of them. The **dialogues** may be divided into early, **middle** and later periods of composition. The **earliest** represent Plato's attempt to communicate the philosophy and dialectical style of Socrates. Several of these dialogues take the **same form**. Socrates encountering someone who claims to know much professes to be ignorant and seeks assistance from the one who knows. As **Socrates** begins to raise questions, it becomes, however, clear that the one reputed to be wise really does not know (**i.e.**, Cephalus, Polemarchus, **Thrasymachus** on 'Justice') what he claims to know, and **Socrates** emerges as the wiser one because he, at least, knows that he does not know. **Such** knowledge, of course, is the beginning of wisdom. Included in this group of dialogues are **charmides** (an attempt to define temperance), **Lysis** (a discussion of friendship), **Leaches** (a pursuit of the meaning of courage), **Protagoras** (a defence of the thesis that virtue is knowledge and can be taught), **Euthyphro** (a consideration of the nature of piety) and Book I of the **Republic** (A discussion of justice).

**The middle** and the **late** dialogues of Plato reflect his own philosophical development. Most scholars attribute the ideas, in these works, to Plato himself, though **Socrates** continues to be the main character in many of the dialogues. The 'writings of the middle period include **Gorgias** (a consideration of several ethical questions), **Meno** (a discussion of the nature of knowledge) the **Apology** (Socrates' defense of himself as his trial against the charges of **atheism** and **corrupting** Athenian youth), **Crito** (though half-finished, Socrates' defence of obedience to the laws 'of the state), **Phaedo** (the death scene of Socrates, in which he discusses the theory of Forms, the nature of the soul, and the question of immortality), the **Symposium** (Plato's **outstanding** dramatic achievement, which also contains several speeches on beauty and love), the **Republic** (Plato's supreme philosophical achievement), which is also a detailed **discussion** of the nature of justice).

The works of the later period include the **Statesman**, the **Theaetetus** (a denial that knowledge is to be identified with sense, perception), **Promenades** (a critical evaluation of the **theory** of forms), **Sophist** (**further** consideration of the theory of **Ideas**, or Forms), **Philebus** (a discussion of the relationship between pleasure and the good), **Timaeus** (Plato's views on natural science and cosmology), and the **Laws** (a more practical analysis of political and social issues).

Of all his writings, the **Republic** (written over a period of **Plato's** early life as a writer, though **finished** around the year (**i.e.** about 386 BC) he established his Academy, the **Statesman** (written about the year 360 BC.), and the **Laws** (published after his death in 347 BC and written a couple of months earlier) may be said to have contained his entire political philosophy.

The **Republic** of Plato is **by** all means the greatest of all his works. It is **not** only a treatise on politics, **but** is also a treatise dealing with every aspect of human life. It, in fact, deals with **metaphysics** (**the** idea of the Good), moral philosophy (virtue of human soul), education (the

scientific training the rulers ought to have), politics (the Ideal State), the philosophy of history (the process of historical change from the Idea State to tyrannical regime), economy (communism of property and families)—all combined in one. The *Republic* has ten books whose subject-matter can be summed up as under:

- i) Book I deals with man's life, nature of justice and morality.
- ii) Books II to IV explain the organisation of the State, and of the system of education. Here, Plato lays down the features of good man, and ideal society, stating three elements in human nature (appetite, spirit and reason) and their corresponding characteristics in the ideal state (the producers, the auxiliaries, the rulers).
- iii) Books V to VII, while stating the organisation of the ideal State, refer to such a system based on communism (of families and property) and headed by the philosopher-ruler.
- iv) Books VIII and IX tell us how anarchy and chaos visit when the individuals and States get perverted.
- v) Book X has two parts: Part I relates philosophy to art, and Part II discusses the capacity of the soul.

The *Statesman* and the *Laws* deal more with the actual states and ground realities, and as such do not have the same idealism and radical overtures, which the *Republic* possessed. Plato of the *Republic* is what is known to the world: the idealist, the philosopher and the radical.

### 2.2.3 His Methodology

It is usually said that Plato's methodology was deductive, also called the philosophical method. The philosopher, while following this methodology, has his pre-conceived conclusions and then seeks to see them in actual conditions around him: general principles are determined first, and thereafter, are related to particular situation. The deductive method of investigation stands opposite to the inductive one where the conclusions are reached after studying, observing, and examining the data available at hand. Plato, it is said, followed the deductive method in so far as he attempted to find the characteristic features of the state he founded in his imagination in the existing conditions prevailing in the city-states of the ancient Greek Society. Obviously, he did not find what he had imagined, and that was why he felt dizziness (See the quotation from *Seventh Letter* above).

That Plato's methodology is deductive is an important aspect, but it is, at the same time, an amalgam of numerous methodologies is something more important a fact if one seeks to understand Plato. Nettleship is of the opinion that Plato's methodology is inductive as well, for it relates theory with practice. The fact is that Plato follows a variety of methods in expressing his political thought.

Plato's methodology is dialectical, for 'dialect' has been a tradition with the ancient Greeks. Socrates followed this methodology in responding to the views of his rivals by highlighting fallacies in their thinking. Plato, following his teacher Socrates, pursued this methodology in his search for 'the idea of good' and the way it could be reached. In the process, he was not imparting knowledge as much as he was trying to explain how the people could achieve it themselves. By following the dialectical method, Plato discussed the views of numerous individuals, examined each such view, and ultimately reached the conclusion. Plato's notion of justice was the result of debate, which went on among actors such as Cephalus, Polemarchus,

Thrasymachus, Glaucon and Adeimantus—a dialectal method of reaching true meaning of justice.

Plato's methodology is analytical in so far as he divided a phenomenon into its possible parts, analysing each part fully and thereafter knitting the results of all parts together. We see in Plato an analytical mind while he talked about what constitutes human nature: appetite, spirit and reason; he found these elements in body-politic as well: 'appetite' in the producing class, 'spirit' in the soldiers' class; and 'reason' in the ruling class, thus stating that the constituents of the ideal state are producers (who provide the material base), soldiers (who provide the military base) and the rulers (who provide the rational base): "proper provision, proper protection and proper leadership" as C.L. Wayper calls them.

There is also a teleological method in Plato's thinking. Teleology means 'the object with an objective'. It follows that every phenomenon exists for itself and keeps moving towards its desired goal. Plato's teleological approach can well be seen in his theory of Forms. Plato was convinced that what appears is the shadow of what it can be. Form is the best of what we see—realities can attain their forms.

Plato is known for having pursued the deductive method of examining any phenomenon and also expressing his philosophy. He, following the deductive methodology, had had his pre-conceived conclusions and on their basis, constructed his ideal state—explaining how it would be organised, and what characteristic features it would have. *The Republic* was nothing but the creation of his deductive method.

Analogy as a method has also been followed by Plato in his philosophy. Analogy means a form of reasoning in which one thing is inferred to be similar to another thing in a certain respect on the basis of known similarity in other respects. There is a clear analogical method in Plato, a method pursued by Socrates who found analogy in his thought processes by taking recourse to the realms of arts. Plato saw such analogies in the realms of the material world. For the producers of his ideal state, Plato used the word 'human cattle', 'the copper' or 'the bronze'; for the soldiers, he used the word 'the watch dogs' or 'the silver'; and for the rulers, 'the shepherd' and 'the gold'. Such analogies are too common in Plato.

Plato pursued the historical method as well. His *Statesman* and the *Laws* have been written by following the historical methodology wherein he traced the evolution and growth of numerous types of state historically. Even in the *Republic*, Plato did not lose sight of history. He found the solution of all evils prevailing in the then city-states in history. Furthermore, the *Republic*, Barker tells us, "is not only a deduction from the first principles, it is also an induction from the facts of Greek life", meaning thereby that it is based on actual conditions existing then.

---

## 2.3 PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PLATO'S POLITICAL THEORY

---

### 2.3.1 Socratic Base

The Socratic influence on Plato is well known. Professor Maxey (Political Philosophies, 1961) writes: "*In Plato Socrates lived again. The unrivalled protagonist whose matchless logic, flashing irony, and sovereign intellect dominate the writings of Plato was no mortal of flesh and bone, but an apotheosised Socrates, speaking not only what the actual Socrates might have spoken but also what the resplendent imagination of Plato would have him say. How much of what is*

ascribed to Socrates in the works of Plato is of genuine Socratic origin and how much is of Platonic invention, we cannot tell; but it is certain that the genius of Plato deserves no less credit than *the influence of Socrates*" (Italics added).

There was never a time when the Socratic image was out of Plato's mind. Plato would never find himself complete without his master, Socrates. He wrote with a sense of pride: "I thank God that I was born a Greek, and not Barbarian; a freeman and not a slave, a man, and not a woman; but above all, that I was born in the age of Socrates."

It is well said, as George Sabine (*A History of Political Theory, 1973*) says, that the fundamental idea of the *Republic* came to Plato in the form of his master's doctrine that virtue is knowledge: "... The proposition", Sabine writes for Plato, "that virtue is knowledge implies that there is an objective good to be known and that it can in fact be known by rational or logical investigation rather than by intuition, guesswork, or luck? The good is objectively real, whatever anybody thinks about it, and it ought to be realised not because men want it but because it is good". Plato gave his teacher's doctrine—virtue is knowledge—a prime place in his philosophy. Like his teacher, Plato firmly believed that virtue can be attained through knowledge. He, like his teacher, was convinced that human nature has four elements: reason, courage, temperance and justice. Through these, a man could attain virtue which makes man capable to work towards his end; it inspires man.

From Socrates, Plato learnt that the ruler, like a physician or a navigator is an artist and to that extent, administration is an art. Accordingly, taking a lesson from his teacher Socrates, Plato urged that the ruler should be one who knows the art, science and knowledge of administration. Socrates used to say: "The public is ill, we must cure our masters."

The Socratic imprint on Plato can be observed in every sentence the pupil wrote. Socrates was Plato's hero, the character from whose mouth Plato spoke both for himself and for the master. In most of Plato's writings, Socrates was seen almost everywhere, particularly in the *Republic*. One may conclude with Sabine: "It may very well be, then, that some considerable measure of the political principles developed in the *Republic* really belonged to Socrates, and were learned directly from him by Plato. However, this may be, the intellectualist cast of the *Republic* the inclination to find salvation in an adequately educated ruler, is certainly an elaboration of Socrates' conviction that virtue, political virtue not excluded, is knowledge."

### 2.3.2 Theory of Ideas

Theory of Forms or Ideas is at the centre of Plato's philosophy. All his other views on knowledge, psychology, ethics, and state can be understood in terms of this theory. His theory of Forms or Ideas taken from the Greek word "Eidos" is so inter-related to his theory of Knowledge that they can be understood together. Following Socrates, Plato believed that knowledge is attainable and believed it to have two essential characteristics: one, knowledge is certain and infallible; two, that it is to be contrasted with which is only appearance. Knowledge, being fixed, permanent, and unchanging is, according to Plato (following Socrates), identified with the realm of 'ideal' as opposed to the physical world which is seen as it appears. In other words, 'Form', 'Idea', 'Knowledge'—all constitute what is ideal, and what appears to the eye is actual. There is, thus, a difference between what is ideal and what is actual; between what are 'forms' and what are appearances; and between what is knowledge and what is an opinion; and between what 'can be' and what it is or what it is 'becoming'.

Plato's theory of Forms or Knowledge, or Idea is found in the *Republic* when he discussed the image of the divided line and the myth of the cave. In the former, Plato made a distinction

between two levels of awareness: opinion and knowledge. Claims or assertions about the physical or visible world are opinions. The higher level of awareness, on the other hand, is knowledge because there reason is involved.

The myth of the cave, as discussed by Plato, described individuals chained deep within the recesses of a cave where the vision is restricted and no one is able to see another man; the only visible thing is the wall of the cave. Breaking free, one of the individuals escapes from the cave into the light of the day. With the aid of the sun, that person sees for the first time the real world, telling his fellow men that the only thing they have seen heretofore are shadows and appearances and that the real world awaits them if only they are willing to struggle free of their bonds.

The essential characteristics of Plato's theory of Forms would, thus, include: (a) There is a difference between 'Form' or 'Idea'; 'Knowledge' and 'Appearance'; 'Actual', or 'Opinion' as there is difference between the ideal/invisible world and the physical/visible world. (b) The form is the ultimate object of appearance. (c) The actual world can attain the ideal world. (d) Knowledge can replace opinion and is attainable. (e) The visible world is the shadow of the real world. (f) What appears to be is not the Form, but is a form of the Form.

Plato explained that there is a difference between things which are beautiful and what beauty is: former lies in the realm of opinion while the latter, in the realm of knowledge. What is more important is Plato's insistence that the journey from 'appearances' to 'form' is possible through knowledge.

Plato had conceived the Forms as arranged hierarchically—the supreme form is the form of the Good, which like the sun in the myth of the cave, illuminates all the other ideas. The forms of the Good (i.e., the idea of the Good) represents Plato's movement in the direction of attaining goodness. In a way, the theory of Forms, as propounded by Plato, is intended to explain how one comes to know, and how things have come to be as they are, and also how they are likely to attain their ideals.

Plato's theory of Form is closely related to his belief that virtue is knowledge. According to Plato, the idea of virtue is the idea of action; the ultimate object of virtue is to attain knowledge; the knowledge of virtue is the highest level of knowledge; knowledge is attainable; and so is virtue attainable.

Plato's theory of Form has been extended by him to his political theory. The types of rulers Plato sought to have should be those who have the knowledge of ruling people. Until power is in the hands of those who have knowledge (i.e., the philosophers), states would have peace, so thought Plato.

---

## **2.4 POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF PLATO**

---

### **2.4.1 Theory of Justice**

For Plato, justice does not consist in mere adherence to the laws, for it is based on the inner nature of the human spirit. It is also not the triumph of the stronger over the weaker, for it protects the weaker against the stronger. A just state, Plato argues, is achieved with an eye to the good of the whole. In a just society, the rulers, the military, the artisan all do what they ought to do. In such a society, the rulers are wise; the soldiers are brave, and the producers exercise self-control or temperance.

'Justice' is the central theme of the Plato's Republic; its sub-title entitled "Concerning Justice". For Plato, justice is a moral concept. Barker says: "Justice is, for Plato, at once a part of human virtue and the bond which joins men together in the states. It makes man good and makes him social." Almost a similar view has been expressed by Sabine. He says: "Justice (for Plato) is a bond which holds a society together."

Justice gives the resemblance of what is used in the Greek language 'Dikaiosyne', a word which has a more comprehensive meaning than the word 'justice'. 'Dikaiosyne' means 'just' 'righteousness'. That is why Plato's notion of justice is not regarded legal or judicial, nor is it related to the realms of 'rights' and 'duties', it does not come within the limits of law; it is, as such, related to 'social ethics'. The essential characteristics of Plato's notion can be stated as these: (i) Justice is another name of righteousness. (ii) It is more the performance of duties than the enjoyment of rights. (iii) It is individual's contribution to the society in accordance with his abilities, capacities and capabilities. (iv) It is a social morality; man's obligation. (v) It is the strength of the social fabric as it involves a web of social system.

Before stating these views through Socrates, Plato refuted the then prevailing theories of justice. He denounced the father-son's (Cephalus- Polemarchus) theory of justice of traditional morality—justice giving every man his due, in other words, 'doing to others what is proper' (Cephalus) or 'doing good to friends and harming enemies' (Polemarchus). Plato recognised the worth of the traditional theory of justice which compels men to do what they are supposed to do or justice as phenomena creating unity. But he did not approve of justice being good for some and evil for others. Justice is, Plato held, good for all—the giver as well as the receiver, for friends as well as foes.

Plato also rejected Thrasymachus' radical notion of justice according to which justice is always in the interest of the stronger. He did agree with Thrasymachus that the ruler because he knows the art of ruling, has all the power but did not agree that the ruler rules in his own interest. Plato argued through Socrates that the shoe-maker does not wear all the shoes he makes; the farmer does not eat all the crops he prepares; accordingly the ruler does not make all the laws which benefit him. Plato agreed with Thrasymachus that justice is an art, and that one who knows the art is the artist, and none else.

And yet, there is another theory of justice advocated by two brothers—Glaucón and Adeimantus, Plato's own brothers. The theory is a conventional theory of justice and one which was favourably agreed to by Plato's hero, Socrates. Glaucón held the view that justice is in the interest of the weaker (as opposed, to Thrasymachus' view that it is in the interest of the stranger), and that it is artificial in so far as it is the product of customs and conventions. Glaucón says: "...men do not suffer injustice freely and without restraint. But the weaker, finding that they suffer more injustice than they can inflict, make a contract one with another neither to do injustice, nor to suffer it to be done; and in pursuance of the contract, they lay down a law, the provisions of which are henceforth the standard of action and the code of justice". Plato did see limitations in Glaucón's theory by describing justice as natural and universal as against Glaucón's notion of it as 'artificial' and 'product' of conventions and customs.

Plato's own theory, as stems from the discussion which went on among characters such as Cephalus, Polemarchus, Thrasymachus, Glaucón, Adeimantus and Socrates, appears to be as under:

- 1) Justice is nothing but the principle that each one should pursue a function for which one is fitted by nature; each one to do one's own for one's own and for common good.

- 2) Justice means specialization and excellence.
- 3) Justice helps people to be in a society; a bond that holds society; a harmonious union of individuals, of classes with the state. It is a bond that brings together individuals, classes and state into one frame.
- 4) Justice is both a 'public' and 'private' virtue. It aims at the highest good of the individual (private), and of the whole society (public).

Plato's theory of justice leads to division of labour, specialisation and efficiency. It is, therefore, a principle of specialisation, unity, non-interference and harmony. His notion of justice implies a social virtue, a private and public ethics and a moral dictate. And yet Plato's theory of justice is totalitarian in the sense that it subordinates individual to the state.

## 2.4.2 Scheme of Education

Plato's *Republic* is not merely an essay on government, it is, as Rousseau informs us, a treatise on education. The essence of his whole philosophy, as stated in the *Republic*, was to bring about reforms (political, economic, social as well as moral, intellectual, cultural) in the ancient Greek society. The object of the *Republic* was to locate and thereafter establish justice in the ideal state and his scheme of education aimed, precisely, at that. For Plato, social education is a means to social justice. It is, therefore, not incorrect to say that education, for Plato, had been a solution to all the vexed questions. Education, as Klowsteit tells us, has been an instrument for moral reforms.

Plato's theory of education is an attempt to touch the evil at its very source. It is an attempt to cure a mental malady by a mental medicine. Barker rightly says that Plato's scheme of education brings the soul into that environment which in each stage of its growth is best suited for its development.

Plato's theory of education is important in his political theory. It is important in so far as it provides a basis for the ideal state designed to achieve justice. Following his teacher, Socrates, Plato had a belief in the dictum that Virtue is knowledge and for making people virtuous, he made education a very powerful instrument. Plato also believed that education builds man's character and it is, therefore, a necessary condition for extracting man's natural faculties in order to develop his personalities. Education is not a private enterprise for Plato; it is public in so far it provides a moral diagnosis to the social ailments. Barker, speaking for Plato, says that education is a path of social righteousness, and not of social success; it is a way to reach the truth. Education, Plato emphasised, was necessary for all the classes in society, especially for those who govern the people. The rulers, for Plato, are supreme because they are educated by philosophers, for the rule of the philosophers, as Barker explains, is the result of the education they receive.

Plato, in his proposed scheme of education, accepts certain assumptions: (i) soul, being initiative and active, throws up, through education, the best things that are latent in it; (ii) education moulds the character of the growing young; it does not provide eyes to the blind, but it does give vision to men with eyes; it brings soul to the realms of light; it activates and reactivates the individual (iii) each level of education has a pre-assigned function: the elementary education helps individuals give direction to their powers; middle level education helps individuals understand their surroundings; and higher education helps individuals prepare, determine and decide their course of education; (iv) education helps people earn a living and also helps them to become better human beings.

Plato does not want to make education a commercial enterprise. He wants, as Sabine tells us, that education must itself provide the needed means, must see that citizens actually get the training they require, and must be sure that the education supplied is consonant with the harmony and well-being of the state. "Plato's plan, Sabine states, "is therefore, for a state-controlled system of compulsory education. His educational scheme falls naturally into parts, the elementary education, which includes the training of the young persons up to about the age of twenty and culminating in the beginning of military service, and the higher education, intended for those selected persons of both sexes who are to be members of the two ruling classes and extending from the age of twenty to thirty-five".

Plato's scheme of education had both the Athenian and the Spartan influence. Sabine writes: "Its most genuinely Spartan feature was the dedication of education exclusively to civic training. Its content was typically Athenian, and its purpose was dominated by the end of moral and intellectual cultivation." The curriculum of the elementary education was divided into two parts, gymnastics for training the body, and music for training the mind. The elementary education was to be imparted to all the three classes. But after the age of twenty, those selected for higher education were those who were to hold the highest positions in the guardian class between twenty and thirty five. The guardians were to be constituted of the auxiliary class, and the ruling class. These two classes were to have a higher dose of gymnasium and music, greater dose of gymnastics for the auxiliaries, and greater dose of music for the rulers. The higher education of the two classes was, in purpose, professional, and for his curriculum Plato chose the only scientific studies—mathematics, astronomy and logic. Before the two classes could get on to their jobs, Plato suggested a further education till the age of about fifty, mostly practical in nature.

In conclusion, we may identify the characteristic features of Plato's scheme of education as these: (i) His scheme of education was for the guardian class, i.e., the auxiliary class and the ruling class; he had ignored the producing class completely; (ii) His whole educational plan was state controlled; (iii) It aimed at attaining the physical, mental, intellectual, moral development of human personality; (iv) It consisted of three stages: elementary between 6 to 20; higher, between 20 and 35; practical, between 35 and 50; (v) It aimed at preparing the rulers for administrative statesmanship; soldiers for military skill; and producers for material productivity; (vi) It sought to bring a balance between the individual needs and social requirement,

Plato's plan of education was undemocratically devised in so far as it ignored the producing class. It was limited in nature and was restrictive in extent by laying more emphasis on mathematics than on literature. The whole plan was unexpectedly and unduly expensive. It was un-individual in the sense that it restricted man's thinking process and his autonomy. It was too abstract and too theoretical, so much so, it lost sight of administrative intricacies.

### **2.4.3 Community of Wives and Property**

Plato's consistency is beyond any doubt. If his theory of communism of property is a logical corollary of his conception of justice, and his theory of communism of families was a logical corollary of his views on communism of property. Justice, as Plato had put it, was the very objective of the ideal state. The ideal state, Plato went on to say, consisted of the three classes—those of the rulers, of the auxiliaries, and of the producers, each doing its own assigned job. Justice would be ushered in, Plato argued, if the guardians (the rulers and the auxiliaries) do away with property, for property represents the elements of appetite, and to do away with property demands the communism of families. As Barker, writes for Plato: "The abolition of family life among the guardians is, thus, inevitably a corollary of their renunciation of private

property. According to Dunning: "As private property and family relationships appear to be the chief sources of dissension in every community, neither is to have recognition in the perfect state." According to Sabine, so firmly was Plato convinced of the pernicious effects of wealth upon government that he saw no way to abolish the evil except by abolishing wealth itself. The same is true also of Plato's purpose in abolishing persons, as another (first being property) potent rival to the state in competing for the loyalty of rulers. "Anxiety for one's children", Sabine concludes on behalf of Plato, "is a form of self-seeking more insidious than the desire for property...".

Plato's communism, to put his theory very briefly, takes two forms. Sabine says: "The first is the prohibition of private property, whether houses as land or money, to the rulers (and auxiliaries) and the provision that they shall live in barracks and have their meals at a common table. The second is the abolition of a permanent monogamous sexual relation and the substitution of regulated breeding at the behest of the rulers for the purpose of securing the best possible offspring". This two-type of communism is applied on the rulers and the auxiliaries called the guardians by Plato.

Plato's argument for communism of property and families was that the unity of the state demands their abolition. "The unity of the state is to secure; property and family stand in the way; therefore, property and marriage must go" (Sabine).

To find similarities between Plato's and Marx's communism, as Professor Jaszi or Professor Maxey do, is to draw wrong parallels. Plato's communism has a political objective—an economic solution of a political ailment; Marx's communism has an economic objective—a political solution of an economic ailment. Plato's communism is limited to only two classes—the rulers and the auxiliaries while Marx's communism applies to the whole society. Plato's basis of communism (or property) is material temptation and its nature is individualistic while Marx's basis is the growth of social evils, which result from the accumulation of private property.

Plato's reasons for offering his scheme of community of wives and property were the following: Those who exercise political power should have no economic motives, and those who are engaged in economic activities should have no share in political power. Pragmatic as his message was, Plato had learnt from the Spartan successful experiment whose citizens were denied the use of money and where they all had to consume everything in common.

Plato's defense of the communism of families was no less effective. Barker sums up Plato's argument in this regard: "Plato's scheme has many facets and many purposes. It is a scheme of eugenics; it is a scheme for the emancipation of women; it is a scheme for the nationalisation of the family. It is meant to secure a better stock, greater freedom for women and for men—to develop their highest capacities, a more complete and living solidarity of the state or at any rate, of the rulers of the state."

Plato's plan of communism has been denounced by many, from his disciple Aristotle down to Karl Popper. Aristotle criticises Plato for having ignored the natural instinct of acquisition, making the scheme partial in so far as excluding the producing class from it and declaring it ascetic and aristocratic, surrendering all the best for the guardians. Others, including Karl Popper, condemn Plato's scheme of communism on numerous grounds, especially the following:

- a) It is doubtful if communism of families would bring greater degree of unity by making the guardians a single family.

- b) Communism of wives and families, that Aristotle hints at, was bound to create confusion if not disorder—one female would be wife of all the guardians and one male, the husband of all the females. One may add, as Aristotle really does: a father would have thousand sons, and a son, thousand fathers.
- c) Common children would tend to be neglected, for everybody's child would be nobody's baby.
- d) It is also doubtful if the state-controlled mating would ever be workable; it would rather reduce men and women to the levels of mere animals by suggesting temporary marital relationship.
- e) The whole scheme of communism is too rigid, too strict, and too stringent.
- f) Plato's communism of families suggests a system of marriage which is neither monogamy, nor bigamy, nor polygamy, nor polyandry.
- g) Plato's theory of communism is too idealistic, too utopian, too imaginary, and accordingly, far away from the realities of life.

#### 2.4.4 Ideal State : The Ruling Class/Philosophic Ruler

In all his works on political theory, there is a strong case, which Plato builds in favour of an omni-competent state. Living is one thing, but living well is another and perhaps a different thing altogether. It is the job of the government, Plato affirmed more than once, to help people live a complete life. The problem which Plato addressed was not how best a government could be created but how best a government could be installed. It was, thus, with Plato, a matter of just not a government, but a just government; just not a government any how, but a perfect government; just not a government any way, but an ideal government, the ideal state.

In the *Republic*, Plato constructs the ideal state in three successive stages: The *healthy state* or what Glaucon termed as 'the city of pigs', is more or less a social grouping where men get together, on the principles of 'division of labour', and of 'specialisation', to meet their material needs; the *luxurious state*, arising out of the men of a healthy state to quench their thirst of 'sofas and tables', also of 'saucer and sweets', and requiring, thus, a band of 'dogs keen to scent, swift of foot to pursue, and stray of limb to fight,' the auxiliaries; the just *state*, the ideal one, where among the 'dogs', the philosophers are able to judge by 'the rule of knowing; whom to bite,' that is, 'gentleness to friends and fierceness against enemies', are there to guide the rest. Thus, there is a clear hint of the classes, which constitute the ideal state—the producing class, the auxiliary class, and the ruling class. In the *Republic*, the state is led by the philosophers; in the *Statesman*, it is a mixed state ideally led by statesman, and in the *Laws*, it is actual state as it is, led by the laws. The ideal state of the *Republic* is the *form* of the historical (Politics) and *actual* (laws) states.

Plato's rulers, either the philosophers of the *Republic*, or statesman of the *Politics* or the impersonal laws of the *Laws* have the responsibilities of preserving and promoting the interests of the whole community. Their aim is, as Plato expressed in the *Republic*, giving order and happiness to the state: "Our aim is founding the state", Plato continues, "was ... the greatest happiness of the whole; we thought that in a state which is ordered with a view to the good of the whole we should be most likely to find justice." Or again, "we mean our guardians to be true saviours and not the destroyer of the State." In the *Politics*, Plato said that the governors ought to "use their power with a view to the general security and improvement." In the *Laws*, Plato was worried about the "well-being of the state." What he wanted were rulers, and not pretenders—rulers who must know their job and should be able to perform it in the interests

of all. They should be wise, courageous, temperate and just—the qualities as expressed in the *Republic*; wise and versed in the traditional customs, the unwritten laws of the divinely remote past, as in the *Politics*, and work under the dictates of the written laws as in the *Laws*.

The use of analogies in the writings of the ancient Greek thinkers was a usual exercise, showing, as Barker says; "a characteristic of the transition from the old philosophy of nature to the new philosophy of man." His use of analogies demonstrated his love for the art of ruling, planning his ruler in the image of an artist. There are the 'dog-soldiers' for guarding and watching the human cattle and also for keeping the wolves—enemies—at bay; 'the shepherd—guardian' for looking after the human sheep—all these are mentioned in the *Republic*. There is 'the physician-statesman' responsible for the general health of the ailing-state; 'the pilot-statesman', skilled in his art, wise in his job and rich in his experiences, for ordering the affairs of the ship of the state; 'the weaver-states-man' for creating a 'just harmony' uniting different elements of human nature—all these are mentioned in the *Politics*.

Knowledge is the merit which qualifies the rulers to rule their people. It helps them, Plato said, perform their responsibilities in the most perfect manner. The rulers, he insisted, ought to know the science of politics; they ought to use this science, he held, as the artist uses his art. What Plato urged was the very competence of the rulers and strict discipline in the performance of their functions. His rulers do the job of ruling as the peasant does the tilling; the peasant is a peasant because he knows the job of tilling, so that ruler is a ruler because he knows the job of ruling.

Plato did not take any chance which could put the rulers away from their ideals. So there are the communistic devices applied on the rulers as in the *Republic*; the promises from them to be alive to the divinely customs as in the *Politics*, and the demands from them to be loyal to the written codes as in the *Laws*. Plato wanted the art and science of politics to be directed toward the attainment of a just order in which each individual, or each group of individuals does his own appointed function. This is why he makes his rulers experts in their branch of business; this is why he makes his rulers undergo an intensive system of education and training; this is why he makes his rulers lead a life devoid of any personal temptations. His anxiety was to build a perfect and hierarchical society where the rulers are expected to uphold and maintain ideals of justice (*Republic*), sustentation (*Politics*) and public good (*Laws*). Plato vested in his philosophic ruler absolute powers on the premise that reason ought to be supreme. However, what he did not safeguard, as rightly pointed out by Popper against was the possible abuse and misuse of unchecked absolute powers no matter how just or wise the ruler might be.

Plato writes in the *Laws*: "[I]f anyone gives too great a power to anything, too large a sail to vessel, too much food to the body, too much authority to the mind, and does not observe the mean, everything is overthrown, and, in the wantonness of excess runs in the one case to disorders, and in the other to injustice ....". His rulers have power, they have power because they have responsibilities, maintaining 'the rule of justice', allowing, 'no innovation in the system of education', and watching 'against the entry either of poverty or of wealth into the state', and keeping the size of the state 'neither large nor small, but one and sufficient.'

---

## 2.5 EVALUATION OF PLATO'S POLITICAL THEORY

---

### 2.5.1 Plato's Adversaries

Plato has been interpreted in so different ways that they make conclusions wry. If for one set of people, Plato is a revolutionary and a prophet of socialism, for others, he is a fore-runner

of fascism and an advocate of reactionaries. Aristotle, Plato's disciple, was his greatest critic. R.H.S. Crossman (*Plato Today*), C.M. Bowra (*Ancient Greek Literature*), W. Fite (*The Platonic Legend*), B. Farrington (*Science of Politics in the Ancient World*), A.D. Winspear (*The Genesis of Plato's Thought*) Karl Popper (*The Open Society and its Enemies*) are men who have condemned Plato. G.C. Field (*Plato and his Contemporaries*), Ronald B. Levinson (*In Defence of Plato*), John Wild (*Plato's Modern Enemies and the Theory of Natural Law*), A.E. Taylor (*The Man and His Work*), Ernest Barker (*Greek Political Theory*), R.L. Nettleship (*Lectures on the Republic of Plato*) admire him.

Of all the critics, Popper's criticism of Plato is the most devastating. Plato, to Popper, was an enemy of the open society. Popper holds the view that Plato advocated a closed system, which was not different from an idealised reproduction of the tribalism of the past. To Popper, Plato's philosophy and its theories—of justice, communism, and education etc, are but so many subtle ways of justifying authoritarianism and totalitarianism. Plato's philosophy sought to perpetuate or eternalise the ideal—the ideal of anti-democracy, anti-change and anti-open society. Popper's tirade against Plato can be summed up in his own words: "Plato's fundamental demands can be expressed in either of the two formula, the first corresponding to his idealist theory of change and rest, the second to his naturalism. The idealist formula is: Arrest all political change. Change is evil, rest divine. All change can be arrested if the state is made an exact copy of its original, i.e., of the Poem or Idea of the city. Should it be asked how this is practicable, we can reply with the naturalistic formula: Back to *the Nature*. Back to the original state of our forefathers, the primitive state founded in accordance with human nature, and therefore, stable; back to the tribal patriarchy of the time before the Fall, to the natural class rule of the wise few over the ignorant many." (Popper Italics)

Condemning Plato's political programme, Popper says that it "far from being morally superior to totalitarianism, is fundamentally identical with it." Popper asserts that Plato's ideal state would lead to a closed system. To quote Popper: "Excellent as Plato's sociological diagnosis was, his own development proves that the therapy he recommends is worse than the evil he tries to combat. Arresting political change is not the remedy; it cannot bring happiness. We can never return to the alleged innocence and beauty of the closed system. Our dream of heaven cannot be realised on earth. Once we begin to rely upon our reason, and to use our powers of criticism ... we cannot return to a state of implicit submission to tribal magic. For those who have eaten of the tree of knowledge, paradise is lost. The more we try to return to the heroic age of tribalism, the more surely do we arrive at the inquisition, at the secret police, and at a romanticised gangsterism. Beginning with the suppression of research and truth, we must end with the most brutal and violent destruction of all that is human. There is no return to a harmonious state of nature. *If we turn back, then we must go the whole way ... we must return to the best*" (Popper's Italics).

John Jay Chapman, a devout anti-Platonist, called Plato 'the prince of conjurers'. W. Fite holds the view that Plato had the vacillations of an adolescent. R.H.S. Crossman says that Plato was wrong, both for his times and for ours.

Plato's adversaries have been active in all the ages beginning from his own days and even including his pupils, Aristotle particularly. Plato's enemies have been really unfair to him. Popper's condemnation is an illustration of such treatment of Plato. If Plato were truly totalitarian, then he would have built a police state; would have made provisions for secret police; would have suggested severe and harsh punishments; would have provided concentration camps. Would have landed terror. But nowhere do we find Plato saying all this. On the contrary, he pictures an ideal state whose aim is ethical, whose rulers are guided by a rational plan and who have to have a particular type of education, a systematic training and a life of dedication and almost of renunciation.

## 2.5.2 Plato's Place in Western Political Theory

Plato's political philosophy, which emerges from his writings has its special importance in the history of the Western Political Theory. Jowett (*The Dialogues of Plato*, 1902) rightly describes Plato as the father of philosophy, politics and literary idealism. He says: "[N]owhere in Plato is there a deeper irony or a greater wealth of humor or imagery, or more dramatic power (as in the *Republic*). Nor in any other of his writings is the attempt made to interweave life and speculation, or to connect politics to philosophy." Professor Maxey (*Political Philosophies*, 1961) writes: "... But the midrib of his (Plato's political philosophy was timeless and universal. As a Greek of the post-Periclean period, he was an anti-expansionist, a disbeliever in democracy, a foe of commercialism, and an admirer of Lacedaemonian militarism. But as an analyst of social and political institutions and a seeker of the ideal he was the forerunner and inspirer of most of the anti-materialistic political philosophies, reconstructive political theories, and radical political programs which have appeared in subsequent ages". For Emerson, "Plato was philosophy and philosophy, Plato".

Plato's contribution to the western political thought is without any parallel. He has given it a direction, a basis and a vision. Political idealism is Plato's gift to western political philosophy. An idealist, as Plato really was, he was more interested in future than in the present; in a model that a state can be than in the actual state; in the form of the state than in a state that appears at present. This does not mean that the idealists do not take into account what the present or the actual state is. In fact, the idealists build the fabric of the future on the basis of the present; it is the present that dictates their future. Plato's idealism was grounded in the circumstances of the then city-states; his was a movement to change the Greek of his own times, not for the past as Popper says, but for a future, for a model and that too through a rational plan. Accordingly, Plato can be described as an idealist, but not a utopian; a physician and not a life-giver; a reformer and not a dreamer.

There is originality in Plato in so far he had build not very uncommon institutions on postulates he thought basic. Plato's significance lies in making education as the bedrock on which is structured the whole ideal state. If the whole scheme of education is practised completely, the development of the state is certainly assured. Sound education and sound nurturing are guarantees for full-fledged betterment. He was of the opinion that the state could be structured afresh as against Popper's view of piecemeal social engineering.

Plato is a philosopher and at the same time an idealist. A philosopher is one who thinks more than he sees; he sees things in general, and avoids what is particular. Plato was such a philosopher who saw the general deteriorating conditions of the city-states of his time. He sought to diagnose the ailment, rather than the symptoms. What ailed the ancient Greek society was the ever-sickening corrupt rulers, and his diagnosis, then, was to give the people a set of rulers who knew the art of ruling. Plato was such a philosopher who never lost sight of philosophy, one that was idealistic, purposive, future-oriented and normative, and yet within the framework of actual conditions. He did reach the heights but he remained within the reach of what was practicable. He **was**, thus, a philosopher who remained within the boundaries of realities; he was a philosopher who looked toward the sky but with his feet grounded on the earth. Plato may not be a saint, but he is a teacher of all of us. We can criticise him but we cannot ignore him.

Plato's another contribution to western political thought was his radicalism. He innovated novel ideas and integrated them skillfully in a political scheme. His radicalism lies in the fact that his rulers are rulers without comforts and luxuries possessed by men of property; they are masters without owning anything; they are parents without calling the children their own; they have

powers, absolute powers but they also have absolute responsibilities. It was a plan to organise the entire social order on the basis of knowledge, skill and expertise. It was a total negation to the Periclean idea of participatory democratic order with emphasis on capacity and individuality rather than equality.

Plato's attempt in the *Republic* is to portray a perfect model of an ideal order. With primacy of education he conceived of an elite which would wield power not for themselves but for the good of the society. But there was no prescription for checking degeneration or abuse of power. It is because of such an important omission, his more realistic pupil, Aristotle conceived of an ideal state not on the blueprint of the *Republic* but of the *Laws*. The beginning of the modern democratic order based on the rule of law could be traced to the *Laws* and not to the *Republic*.

However, Plato's place in western political thought is matchless. His legacy spreads with age and it is really difficult to prepare a list of subsequent political philosophers who might not have Plato's imprint, either explicitly or implicitly.

---

## 2.6 SUMMARY

---

Plato was one of the prolific writers, a philosopher, of the ancient Greece, born in 428/7 BC and died in 348/7 BC. His works have come to us in the forms of dialogue which have an appeal to the educated, and an interest in philosophy. He was a great political philosopher. In him, myth, metaphor, humor, irony, paths and a rich Greek vocabulary captivate those who read him as his philosophy leads to the most pressing issues of the mind and reality. Plato was influenced by his teacher, Socrates, and by the then conditions of the ancient Greek.

The theme of Plato's social and political thought, especially of the *Republic* is that philosophy alone offers true power—it also is the way to knowledge. The philosopher knows the forms, the ideals. He alone is fit to rule—those who are guided by reason and knowledge alone should have the power. They alone are capable of establishing justice, to see that everyone contributes to the best of his abilities, of maintaining the size and purity and unity of the state. These rulers, possessed with the element of gold, together with man of silver and of copper, constitute the ideal state. Justice, for Plato, lies in each class (and in each individual in his own class) doing his own job. Plato gives to these three classes education which each one needs. Plato, being a perfectionist, does not take any chance and seeks to have a corruption-free administration. That is why he applies communistic devices on the guardians.

Plato's friends and foes are numerous. His admirers describe him as an idealist and a philosopher, as also a teacher of all; his adversaries condemn him as the enemy of open society, an anti-democrat and a fascist. His contribution to western political thought is without any parallel. He has given western political thought a basis, a vision and a direction.

---

## 2.7 EXERCISES

---

- 1) Critically examine Plato's Theory of Education.
- 2) Evaluate Plato's Theory of Justice in the light of the prevailing theories of justice.
- 3) Explain the importance of community of wives and property in Plato's ideal state.
- 4) Discuss Plato's theory of ideal state. What qualities does Plato suggest for the ruling class?
- 5) Assess Popper's critique of Plato.
- 6) Evaluate Plato's political philosophy. What is Plato's contribution to western political thought?