



Research Paper

Plato's Concept of Ideal State-Relevance in The Present Scenario

Dr.T.S.Shyam Prasad

Lecturer in Political Science, SVGM Government Degree College
KALYANDURG-515761 State of Andhra Pradesh

Abstract

Plato wrote and taught in his academy. Enough remains of his written work to outline and assess the key concepts of his philosophy; in them, we can find the origin of European political thought. Plato reviewed the condition of the Greek city-states at that time. He observed that there were full of anarchy and tyranny in Athens. After his observation, he prepared the outline of an 'ideal state' to establish national strength, harmony prosperity, and unity among the people. Plato created his ideal state and discussed the relationship between man and the state. A good nation can develop good qualities in its citizens. The human soul is primarily composed of conscience, attitude, and appetite. He believed that this would create an ideal state and the country would move on the path of progress. The purpose of this Ideal State was actually to give direction to the nation and government of Greece. Plato's ideal state has some important features, which are the highlight of this theory.

The main idea of Plato's ideal state is justice. In an ideal state, justice should be established at the highest place. The correctness of justice and the school of law is known only to the philosopher king. Promoting, spreading justice, and making every person aware of his duty represent the practice of the true wisdom of the Philosopher King. He will represent knowledge itself and maintain the unity and harmony of the country. Plato, who had learned from Socrates that beauty cannot exist without a beautiful thing, and like him, he too believed that the idea is real, had conceived this ideal state as only an 'idea'. This was his idea of 'good'. He knew about its instability and that is why he talked about his second-best state in his later writings like *Statesman* and *Laws*.

Key Words: Philosopher King, Virtue, Communism of Wives

Received 03 June., 2025; Revised 11 June., 2025; Accepted 13 June., 2025 © The author(s) 2025.

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I. Introduction:

Plato (427-347 B.C.) was born to aristocratic Athenian parents. Plato abandoned Athens to travel and learn but carried with him the basic tenets of thoughts of his mentor Socrates, who famously said that "virtue is knowledge." Plato's wanderings took him far from his native Athens. In the Greek cities of southern Italy, he became familiar with the doctrines of mystic Pythagorean society. This society stressed class structure and mathematics, which later occupied an important position in the curriculum of Plato's Athenian academy.

He was impressed by the caste system of conservative Egyptian society. In Syracuse, by lecturing about the monarch and proper methods of rulership, Plato incurred the anger of Dionysius I. Dionysius enslaved Plato for a short time. Upon his release, he returned to Athens to found his academy, which would be his forum until his death. Plato's academy was the first of the great schools of philosophy, and in it, Plato conducted an educational center for the training of statesmen. Through his students, Plato was to have an impact on the political systems of Athens and the other city-states. Plato wrote and taught in his academy. Enough remains of his written work to outline and assess the key concepts of his philosophy; in them, we can find the origin of European political thought. Plato reviewed the condition of the Greek city-states at that time. He observed that there were full of anarchy and tyranny in Athens. After his observation, he prepared the outline of an 'ideal state' to establish national strength, harmony prosperity, and unity among the people. Plato created his ideal state and discussed the relationship between man and the state. A good nation can develop good qualities in its citizens. The human soul is primarily composed of conscience, attitude, and appetite. He believed that this

would create an ideal state and the country would move on the path of progress. The purpose of this Ideal State was actually to give direction to the nation and government of Greece. Plato's ideal state has some important features, which are the highlight of this theory.

Plato's Concept of an Ideal State:

In Plato's time, many Athenians considered their large towns and their city-states to be perfect. That is, ideal in regards to their cultural and military achievements. However, the famous philosopher Plato considered the case to be otherwise. He was skeptical of a society that gave no specific place to those with expertise in politics. In addition, Plato was well learned in the seediness of Athens—its arrogant nature, military, political, and social errors, and even its contempt towards its own citizens. Plato saw through the Athenian state's facade and became inspired to formulate the ideals of his perfect state, or "ideal," state.

Three Waves of the Ideal State

The blueprints for Plato's new society were designed to be established in three waves. Three waves to eliminate corruption and bring in new principles and ideals. The three waves are as follows:

1. *A new ruling class of Guardians, consisting exclusively of Philosopher-Kings.*
2. *Guardians of the state, being a mixture of men and women.*
3. *Guardians would live communally, without any private property of their own.*

1. First Wave:

The first wave consists of the new ruling class of Guardians, which is to consist of only Philosopher Kings. He defined a philosopher as an individual who has a great affinity for knowledge. He believed that knowledge was the key to a successful ruler. According to him, either philosophers should become kings or kings should become philosophers. Plato's desire for this first wave was due to Athens' dislike of people of high stature. The Athenians considered Plato's kind rogues or useless individuals who thought themselves better than the rest of society.

2. Second Wave:

Plato's second wave consists of the Guardians being a mixture of men and women. This idea was very rational for Plato's time because women were not involved politically in that era. Women were not active politically until relatively modern times, which means that Plato was quite a knowledgeable philosopher, not just by ancient Greek standards but also by modern-day standards.

3. Third Wave:

His third wave stated that the Guardians would live communally, without owning any private property of their own. They would not even own any wealth. They would share their things, and in this way, Athenians would lose their need to be jealous of one another because of class rankings. Envy would become non-existent because there would not be a concern with the possession of wealth. As everyone would have the same items, there would not be disagreements over who owns what.

Features of Plato's ideal state

1. Rule of the Philosopher King:- Plato's state is ruled by the King, who is also a philosopher, who has the role of head of state. It is the rule of the philosopher-king. It is the rule of knowledge and wisdom. The Philosopher King is the embodiment of wisdom and knowledge.

2. State-Controlled Education System: A state-controlled education system can raise philosopher kings and establish them in a better position. It can also develop inherent qualities in every individual, and this was the ultimate objective of this education system. The state is an educational institution and training is essential in all government-controlled educational systems. The training will help in gaining higher knowledge as well as in state management. Higher education courses include science education, mathematics, astronomy, logic, etc. In the primary education system, the child's body and mind are kept healthy by giving physical education and music education. To build an ideal, education system of Plato play an important role.

3. Communism of Wives and Property: In Plato's view, the philosopher king would not care about anything other than the national interest. The philosopher king can be free from family disputes and concentrate on the welfare of the state and gaining greater knowledge. Feminism and money communism only apply to the ruling class. They can personally dictate all of their actions without recourse.

4. Justice: The main idea of Plato's ideal state is justice. In an ideal state, justice should be established at the highest place. The correctness of justice and the school of law is known only to the philosopher king. Promoting, spreading justice, and making every person aware of his duty represent the practice of the true wisdom of the Philosopher King. He will represent knowledge itself and maintain the unity and harmony of the

country. Since the ideal state and justice are inseparable from each other, the king must implement its results. Justice means the duty of citizens and the duty of the person who is appointed to do his duty properly.

5. Functional Specialization- According to Plato, there are three classes in the state. The first is the philosopher's king or ruler, who would represent wisdom. Since they are experienced in politics, they will spend their time on the welfare of the country. The second class is the military. They are engaged in the security of the country by carrying out its military tasks. The third class is producers. People in the third category will naturally try to prevent hunger and engage in productive work. Plato believed that they could not rule. Therefore, when the philosopher-king organizes his work, then people of other classes will also be able to organize their work. This is called Plato's system of division of labor or the principle of performance. While the ruling group was acknowledged as gold, the defenders were acknowledged as silver, and the producers were acknowledged as copper. Most importantly, these three classes should not interface with every class's work.

6. Equality between men and women: Plato has given equal places to both men and women in his ideal state. In his opinion, the day women's liberation or independence comes, it will be said that a real ideal state has been built. Keeping women in the corner of the house is like depriving half of the country of their right to vote. This type of system can not provide proper justice to every individual. So he introduced an equal education system for both men and women.

7. Control of art and literature: According to the Platonic state, art and literature are under the control of the ruling class. There should be a way to prevent cheap, wrong ideas from reaching people. People need to read only literature that is morally sound and wise in its content.

There are several important reasons why Plato strongly believed in the concept of an ideal state. The following are the key reasons:

Frustration with Athenian Democracy:

Plato was deeply dissatisfied with how Athens was governed. As a democracy, Athens allowed citizens to vote for their leaders, but Plato saw this system as flawed. He believed that decision-making should be based on wisdom and competence, not popularity. In "The Republic", he compares democracy to a ship where the crew elects a loud, charismatic captain rather than a skilled navigator. His disillusionment with democracy was further intensified by the execution of his mentor, Socrates. In 399 BCE, Athenian democracy sentenced Socrates to death for encouraging critical thinking. To Plato, this was proof that democracy could be irrational and unjust. He wanted a political system where knowledgeable and virtuous individuals—not the masses—held power.

Chaos and Moral Decline in Greek City-States:-

During Plato's time, Greek city-states were plagued by instability. The Peloponnesian War had left Athens weakened, and its leaders frequently changed, many of them corrupt and power-hungry. Plato observed that this chaos led to moral decay—people became dishonest, selfish, and indifferent to the common good. He believed that unstable governments could never create a strong, unified society. They failed to educate citizens in virtue and wisdom, which he saw as essential for a just and prosperous state. To restore order, Plato sought a radically different political structure.

The Need for Wise Leadership- Plato proposed a simple solution: entrust leadership to the wise and virtuous. He introduced the concept of "philosopher-kings"—rulers who deeply understood truth and justice. In his Ideal State, these leaders would undergo rigorous training in subjects like mathematics, logic, and philosophy to ensure fair and rational governance. Unlike the self-serving politicians he observed, philosopher-kings would rule not for personal gain but for the collective good.

Disappointment with Existing Governments:

Plato's dissatisfaction extended beyond democracy—he found flaws in all contemporary forms of government. Oligarchies concentrated power in the hands of the wealthy, while tyrannies placed authority in the hands of oppressive rulers. In *The Republic*, he argues that these systems inevitably collapse because power is always given to the wrong people. Whether through elections, wealth, or brute force, leadership often ended up in the hands of the undeserving. Plato criticised these governments for neglecting the "common good"—the well-being of all citizens. He envisioned a state that prioritised fairness and moral education rather than power struggles.

A Deep Desire for Justice:

Justice was central to Plato's political philosophy. He did not view it as merely an abstract concept but as the foundation of a well-ordered society. In his Ideal State, individuals would be assigned roles based on their

abilities: the wise would govern, the courageous would defend, and the labourers would provide for society. He compared this structure to the human soul, where reason, spirit, and desires must be in harmony. To prevent corruption, Plato even proposed that rulers should not have families or own private property. This way, their loyalty would be to society as whole rather than personal interests. His Ideal State aimed to create a just, balanced society where every individual contributed meaningfully.

A Vision for Lasting Peace and Unity:

Plato was not seeking a temporary solution—he envisioned a political system that would ensure long-term peace and stability. He believed that a just society should mirror human nature, where intellect leads, courage supports, and desires are kept in check. In his Ideal State, people would recognize their roles and work together harmoniously, reducing conflicts and fostering unity. For Plato, this was more than just an idealistic theory; it was a serious plan for societal reform. After witnessing Athens' struggles and the unjust execution of Socrates, he became convinced that his Ideal State could prevent chaos and create a better future where people lived in peace and prosperity.

Criticism on the Theory:

Plato's concept of the Ideal State, as outlined in *The Republic*, has been a cornerstone of Western political philosophy, yet it has faced significant criticism over the centuries. Below is an analysis of some of the key critiques leveled against his vision of a utopian society governed by philosopher-kings, structured into rigid classes, and guided by the pursuit of justice and the common good.

We can't say whether or not the three waves of Plato's Ideal State would be able to instate a lifestyle that would positively affect even the most common of common farmers.

- Plato favours the absolute rule of the philosopher king. He believes that those alone Who know make his rulers absolute and concentrate unlimited authority in their hands. The truth that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts is bound to reflect on the philosopher king. Degeneration of moral values among philosopher rulers will surely make them tyrants.
- The biggest fault of the Ideal State theory is that the political structure that Plato wanted for the state was never disclosed.
- Even with the philosopher kings, there isn't any law mentioned. This gives way to the crazy notion that there would not be any need for laws as the citizens would be so happy and blissful that they would have no need or want to commit any criminal act.
- It is pure wishful thinking from Plato that made him ignore all these fundamental elements of his ideal state.
- Three classes would be needed in his state: At the top, the rulers would be intellectuals who could think rationally. The middle class: they would be auxiliaries, who would make up a courageous and spirited military, and would be obedient to the ruler. The third class would be money-makers farmers and tradesmen, etc. They are not "working class," as they are allowed to earn money and own property.
- Plato warns that there is a need to take measures to stop excessive wealth or poverty, binding the money-makers to their class forever, just like everyone else to their class. Once born in a certain class, you stay there forever.
- It is also interesting that there is not a fourth class mentioned in his "ideal state," the working class," a class for slaves, as they are the ultimate working class. That doesn't mean that there were not any slaves in his ideal state, on the contrary, they were still very popular, but they were not considered to possess any human rights.
- Plato's ideal state is an ideal only. It is too idealistic to be practical. Plato is hardly a political thinker. He is a moralist, an idealist whose concept of the ideal state is entirely utopian. He imagines a 'city of nowhere'. It is the dream city of Plato, which cannot exist on this Earth at least.
- Plato's rigid division of labour restricts the personal growth of individuals by confining them to specific roles. This system discourages the development of diverse talents and interests, leading to a society where individuals are assign to a particular category roles that may not fully utilize their potential.

II. CONCLUSION:

There is hardly any doubt that Plato's ideal state is a dream city and can be found in clouds only. Plato, who had learned from Socrates that beauty cannot exist without a beautiful thing, and like him, he too believed that the idea is real, had conceived this ideal state as only an 'idea'. This was his idea of 'good'. He knew about its instability and that is why he talked about his second-best state in his later writings like *Statesman* and *Laws*.

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