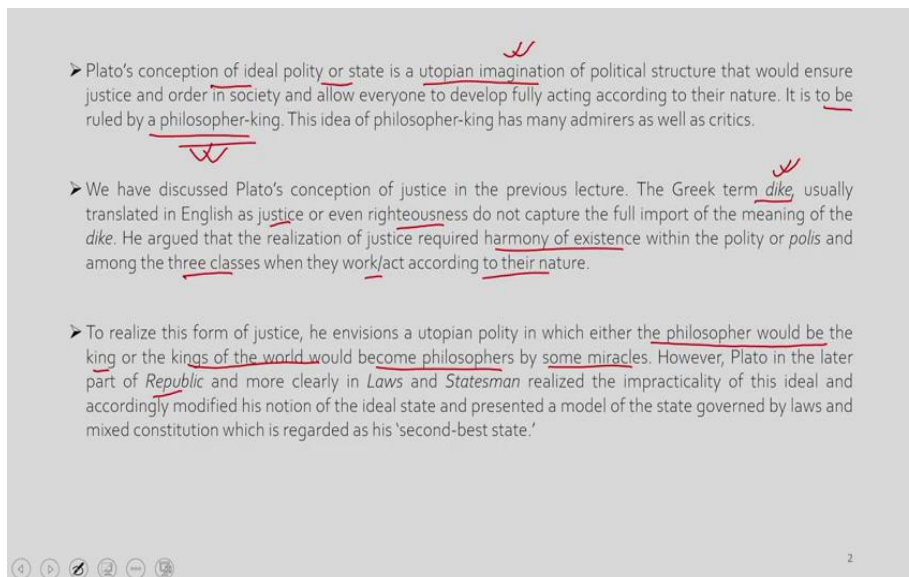


Introduction to Western Political Thought
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Lecture 04
Plato – II State and Philosopher King

Hello everyone, this is the fourth lecture in this course and second on Plato. In the previous lecture on Plato, we have discussed his conception of justice. In today's lecture, we will discuss his views on philosopher king and the ideal state. Eventually, in his later works, he modified that idea to what is referred to as his second-best state. In this lecture, our discussion would revolve around this issue of philosopher king, how to train a philosopher king through a rigorous system of education, and his idea of the second best state. We will also discuss Plato's cyclical view of change in the forms of the state over the years. How corruption eventually change the ruler and objectives of their ruling. We will have one more lecture on Plato that would be the third lecture where we will discuss his idea on the communism of property and wives. In the third lecture before concluding we will also discuss the critical assessment of his thought and Plato's contributions to the history of political thought and philosophy.

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- Plato's conception of ideal polity or state is a utopian imagination of political structure that would ensure justice and order in society and allow everyone to develop fully acting according to their nature. It is to be ruled by a philosopher-king. This idea of philosopher-king has many admirers as well as critics.
- We have discussed Plato's conception of justice in the previous lecture. The Greek term *dike*, usually translated in English as justice or even righteousness do not capture the full import of the meaning of the *dike*. He argued that the realization of justice required harmony of existence within the polity or polis and among the three classes when they work/act according to their nature.
- To realize this form of justice, he envisions a utopian polity in which either the philosopher would be the king or the kings of the world would become philosophers by some miracles. However, Plato in the later part of *Republic* and more clearly in *Laws* and *Statesman* realized the impracticality of this ideal and accordingly modified his notion of the ideal state and presented a model of the state governed by laws and mixed constitution which is regarded as his 'second-best state.'

Plato's conception of the ideal state, or a polity is regarded as utopian. Many would argue that his conception of ideal state or polity is a utopian imagination that would ensure justice and order in society; and allow everyone to develop themselves fully by acting according to their nature. Thus the whole purpose of order or justice in society is to help everybody realise his/her true self. And as we have discussed in the previous lecture, Plato encountered a very turbulent

politics. Power was alternating between oligarchs and the democrats. There was political instability along with the immorality and corruptions in public life. And the pursuit of happiness was obstructed because of political instability, and people were less virtuous. So, for Plato, the main purpose of politics or political order in society is to ensure how human beings could lead a happy and virtuous life. And to lead a happy and virtuous life, Plato imagined a state or a political structure that would be just; that would be stable; and which enable the individuals to act according to their own true nature.

The purpose and objective of Platonic conception of the ideal state was to ensure that individual lives their lives without constraints, without interference from others, and develop themselves to their fullest potentialities. So a craftsman, or a farmer, or a military warrior, or a philosopher would develop their skills to the fullest of their abilities without any restrains. The whole purpose of order or state is to provide them those conditions. Platonic conception of ideal polity or ideal state is rooted in this objective of creating an order or a just society and state. This state and society, according to Plato, must be ruled by the philosopher-king. His idea of philosopher king, since then, has many admirers as well as critique, which we will discuss later.

In the previous lecture, as I said, we have discussed Plato's idea of justice. And one thing we need to understand when we discuss the Platonic idea of justice is that what we translate as justice; in Greek, it was called *dike*. We translate it in English as justice, or many would call it righteousness. And as we look at the definition of *dike* or justice in platonic conception, it is more about acting or working according to one's own nature. And when we work as an individual or as a class according to our own nature, then the result or the outcome would be just. So, if you recall the platonic conception of justice, it is easier to find justice in society; it is the first-principle of a well-ordered society. And by just, it means that all the classes in society should work according to their own nature. So the working, or the performance, or the acting part of justice is more crucial than what we now understand by justice or even righteousness, which has a more religious connotation.

In today's world, we understand by justice distribution of resources, or ensuring the welfare of everyone, whereas, in platonic conception, which in Greek referred to as *dike*, was more about the performance or acting according to one's own nature without interference from others. So, when we talk about the platonic conception of justice, we need to understand that. He argued that the realization of justice required harmony of existence within the polity or *polis*; and also among the three classes when they work/act according to their own nature. That is how justice

can be ensured in society, in the polity, when everybody acts according to his or her own nature, within the individual or also among the classes.

To realize this form of justice, he envisions a utopian polity, in which either the philosopher would be the king, or the kings of the world would become philosophers by some miracles. This makes Platonic philosophy or Platonic idea of polity a fascinating discourse. What he requires is that to establish a just polity we need to have a ruler who is a philosopher, or the king of the world, should become the philosopher. So, either the philosopher would be the king, or the king of the world would become philosophers by some miracle. This conception of philosopher King in the ideal state, Plato describes in the *Republic*. But, he eventually modified it in his later works – *Statesman* and *Laws*. In these works he conceptualised a state that is to be ruled by laws and a mixed constitution. This theory of state is regarded by many scholars as Plato's second-best state. We will discuss Aristotle's thought after Plato, and we will find how Plato's second-best state becomes Aristotle's best state.

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Ideal State: Kallipolis

- Plato, in the *Republic*, set out to design a state that would be just and enable every citizen to lead a virtuous and happy life. Plato calls this ideal state Kallipolis – ruled by the philosopher kings. It would work for the good of everyone by ensuring their maximum happiness.
- In the *Kallipolis* the three classes which correspond to three kinds of the soul – the producers, driven by appetite and guided by desire, passion or instincts; the auxiliaries, driven by courage or honor and guided by the spirit; and finally the philosophers, driven by reason or intellect and guided by wisdom and the good of the people; would acknowledge their interdependence and perform their specialized tasks without interfering into each other's works.
- Plato envisions the role of philosopher-king who alone are capable of seeing things as they are and use noble-lies – the idea of bronze, silver, and golden souls to ensure that everyone in the city performs their allotted tasks. He equates the philosopher-king with the ship-captain, who needs to have mastery over both the 'soul-craft' as well as the 'state-craft'. He then went on to describe the elaborate educational system for the training of philosopher or guardian class in the ideal state.

What is the ideal state for Plato and what he calls it? For Plato, the ideal state is *Kallipolis*. It is a utopian imagination of a good structured polity and state. Plato in *Republic* set out to design a state that would be just. For a state and polity to justify its existence, it must be just. Justice is the first requirement of a state and polity. Its functions should be just; it operates on just principle, and it should enable every citizen to lead a virtuous and happy life. How to lead a good life? For many citizens, the objective of living a good life is to live a happy life.

But how can we lead a happy life? In Socrates' thoughts, and Plato's concepts we have discussed that a happy life is possible only when we live a virtuous life. And what is virtuous life? It is constant pursuit of knowledge and wisdom. The existence of the state, for Plato, is first to ensure justice and provide the condition for everyone to lead a virtuous and happy life. Plato calls this ideal state as *Kallipolis*, which is to be ruled by the philosopher-kings. It would work for the good of everyone. And this conception of the good we will discuss later on. It is different from our ordinary understanding of good and bad, desirable or undesirable.

The philosophical intuitions are at the root of this conception of the good. What is good for society? All the classes will have their own conceptions, but only the philosopher, through their training in mathematics and logic, and even beyond that through their intuitions could know what is good for society. This ideal state of Plato – *Kallipolis*, must be ruled by the philosopher-kings. It would work for the good of everyone by ensuring the maximum happiness. And happiness is realized when individuals are free to develop their talents to the fullest according to their own nature without interference from others.

In the *Kallipolis*, the three classes, which correspond to three kinds of soul, and here I would request you to recall the discussion which we have had in the previous lecture. These three classes are corresponding to the three kinds of soul or within the individual subjectivity or personality where there are appetites at the base, courage and spirit at the middle, and then the reason and intellect at the top. Similarly, in the *Kallipolis*, he envisions the existence of three classes, which corresponds to the three kinds of souls. And these are – first the producer, which includes farmers, traders, craftsmen, and so on, in other words, the producing class. They are driven by appetite, and guided by desire, passion, or instincts. The dominant element or characterization of the producing class, which is the majority in all polities, is that they are driven by appetites and guided by the emotions, or desires, or passions that are momentary. The second and above them are the auxiliary classes of military commanders. And these auxiliary classes, according to Plato, is driven by courage and honour. They are guided by spirit. And finally, only a few in society would chose the path of knowledge and wisdom. They are philosophers. They are driven by reason and guided by the good of the people. These philosophers are driven by wisdom acquired through the relentless pursuit of intellect and reason. So for the philosopher knowledge is an end in itself. In other words, philosophy is also about the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake; it does not require any further justifications. The philosopher in the ideal state are those who seek wisdom for the sake of it without any other motives. And when they become the ruler, their purpose or objective of ruling is to ensure

the good or welfare of everyone. Therefore, according to Plato, when these three classes would acknowledge their interdependence and perform their specialized tasks without interfering with each-others' work, that would create the ideal state; and therefore, in platonic conception, the ideal state is also a just state.

And what is just state? Where three classes will act and perform according to their on nature. The producer will produce, the auxiliary classes will protect, and the philosopher will guide the state. Realizing that all classes perform an essential task which is contributing to the overall growth and welfare of the state. You cannot have a state without the producing classes. Similarly, you need protectors or protecting class to protect the producing classes from external aggressions. And similarly, above all, you need philosophers to guide these classes; and to make the state more just, more ordered that would ensure the maximum happiness to everyone. There is a kind of interdependence and, at the same time, specialization, where there is no interference into each other's works. So, when all the classes act according to their own nature, without hindrance, without interference from others in society, outcome of that would be just or what Plato calls ideal.

In the ideal state, Plato envisions the primary role of philosopher King, who alone are capable of seeing things as they are. For Plato, the other classes, because of their skills, or talents, or nature, or psyche, are incapable of understanding things as they are; they are merely looking at the appearance and therefore have a flawed understanding of things. As we have discussed, the prevailing notion of justice as argued by Thrasymachus, Glaucon, and others, were the imperfect understanding of justice. So there are partly elements of justice in their arguments, but they were flawed too. Similarly, in society, most classes are guided by spirit or appetites, passion and desires. They are incapable of understanding things as they are. They understand things as it appears them to be. And this remains the challenge for many of us when we talk about politics and political developments in our contemporary times. We often comment or respond to what appears to us, rather than subjecting them to our deeper understanding of the larger processes that are determining the political outcomes at any given point of time in history.

Therefore, Plato envisions the role of philosopher-king who alone is capable of seeing things as they are and use the *noble lies* to maintain order and justice in society. It is ironic that Plato, when he argues about philosophy as a search after truth, or wisdom, also support this view of *noble lies*. And what are these noble lies? It is basically about three kinds of souls; bronze or

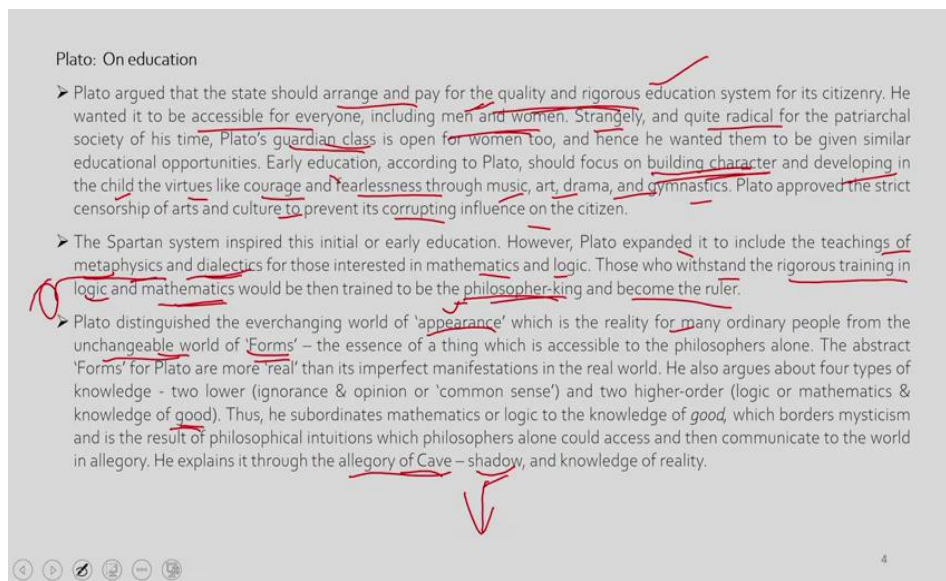
brass, silver, and gold. They correspond to three classes. The bronze would be the producing classes of craftsmen, traders, or farmers; the silver would be the auxiliary classes of military leaders or warriors; and finally the gold is the soul of the philosophers guided by wisdom and knowledge alone through the use of their reason or intellect.

Plato wants the philosopher king to deploy these noble lies in the state to ensure that everyone in the city performs their allotted tasks; and in performing them, they consider it as natural and therefore would not resist them. Thus the purpose of these *noble lies*, according to Plato, is to ensure harmony. And as you know, in the platonic conception of polity, there is no conflict. And if there is a conflict that is against the principle of justice. So within the self, if the emotion or spirit is at conflict with our intellect, then we cannot live harmoniously. Similarly, in the state, if one class counters, or challenge, or interfere with the task of others, society or the polity would not have justice. Now to have justice, to make it a natural thing, Plato envisions this idea of *noble lies*, which philosopher will use to ensure that everyone in society, all the classes in society perform their allotted task without resistance, without questioning, without interference. In this fashion, he equated the role of philosopher king in the state as the ship-captain. Ship while crossing the ocean face many challenges – from sea winds; it could lose the sense direction; it may fail to manage the sailors well who could move the ship forward. So, a good ship-captain needs to have not just the knowledge of wind or knowledge of direction or the craft of navigation, but also need to know how to manage the sailors well to cross the ocean and overcome the challenges. Similarly, in the ideal polity, the role of philosopher-king, according to Plato, is to have the knowledge of state-craft and the soul-craft too. And this is very crucial for us to understand. State-craft is about how to govern or rule for the benefit or the maximum benefit of every sections in society. And the soul-craft is that you enable everyone within that state and polity to develop their fullest talents and realize their full potentiality without interferences from others. And to enable and create those conditions require special wisdom, special knowledge. Philosopher king alone is capable of having or obtaining such knowledge. And therefore, in the Platonic conception of the ideal state, the role of philosopher-king is absolutely necessary. And then, he went on to elaborate the required educational system that would train the philosopher-kings.

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Plato: On education

- Plato argued that the state should arrange and pay for the quality and rigorous education system for its citizenry. He wanted it to be accessible for everyone, including men and women. Strangely, and quite radical for the patriarchal society of his time, Plato's guardian class is open for women too, and hence he wanted them to be given similar educational opportunities. Early education, according to Plato, should focus on building character and developing in the child the virtues like courage and fearlessness through music, art, drama, and gymnastics. Plato approved the strict censorship of arts and culture to prevent its corrupting influence on the citizen.
- The Spartan system inspired this initial or early education. However, Plato expanded it to include the teachings of metaphysics and dialectics for those interested in mathematics and logic. Those who withstand the rigorous training in logic and mathematics would be then trained to be the philosopher-king and become the ruler.
- Plato distinguished the everchanging world of 'appearance' which is the reality for many ordinary people from the unchangeable world of 'Forms' – the essence of a thing which is accessible to the philosophers alone. The abstract 'Forms' for Plato are more 'real' than its imperfect manifestations in the real world. He also argues about four types of knowledge - two lower (ignorance & opinion or 'common sense') and two higher-order (logic or mathematics & knowledge of good). Thus, he subordinates mathematics or logic to the knowledge of good, which borders mysticism and is the result of philosophical intuitions which philosophers alone could access and then communicate to the world in allegory. He explains it through the allegory of Cave – shadow, and knowledge of reality.



Plato argues that the states should arrange and pay for the quality and rigorous educational system for its citizenry. Plato's philosophy of education has been used by many rulers in Victorian England, and also by many contemporary liberal democracies. We want the state to provide quality education, which should be available to everyone universally. Plato, similarly in the classical ancient Greek times, envisions a system of education, which should be qualitative and made accessible to everyone. States should pay for the education as because good and educated citizens are asset to any country or polity.

Therefore, Plato argued that states should arrange and pay for quality and rigorous education system for its citizens. And he wanted this system of education to be accessible for everyone, including men and women. This is the sign of progressiveness of Platonic thinking. And as you know, Athenian society was a patriarchal society; women were confined to the household. They could not participate in public life. However, Plato wanted an equal role for men and women, they wanted them to have similar kind of education to develop their qualities, to develop their talent, and then participate in the overall life in the polity. This system of education should be accessible to everyone without any discrimination. And strangely and quite radical for the patriarchal society of his time, Plato's guardian class is open for women too. The philosopher could be a king and also a queen; he does not discriminate on the basis on gender. That means the rigorous logical thinking, or dialectics, or the knowledge of dialectics, which is necessary to have the correct wisdom of things, is equally accessible for the women as well.

He wanted, therefore, that the guardian classes should be open for both men and women. It was very radical and progressive, considering the prevailing patriarchal notions of his time. Plato

wanted women to be given similar educational opportunity that was available to men. And this system of education would have in early years, teachings in music, crafts, arts, and gymnastics. Early education, according to Plato, should focus on building character and developing in the child the virtues such as courage and fearlessness. And this system of early education is inspired by the Spartan system of education, which focused more on building character, developing fearlessness, and dedication to the work, and so on.

Plato envisions the early system of education, which should focus on building character and cultivating virtues such as fearlessness, courage, and so on through music, art, and gymnastics. Plato approved the strict censorship of art and culture to prevent their corrupting influence on the citizen. So any art form, or any culture that has corrupting influence, that leads to corrupt character, Plato forbids the promotion or protection of such art and culture. Plato appears to be then the first philosopher who argued for the censorship of arts and culture, which would have a corrupting influence on the child. The Spartan system inspired this initial or early education in the Platonic system of education; however, Plato expanded it to include the teachings of metaphysics and dialectics for the later years. Those having interest in mathematics, or logic, or dialectics would be given this rigorous training. It starts with the learning of music, gymnastics, and arts, but it is gradually expanded to include the teachings of mathematics, reasoning, logic, and so on. These are made available for those who are interested in the study of mathematics and logic.

Plato included the teachings of metaphysics and dialectics in his system of education. Metaphysics is the absolute reality, the absoluteness, or the essence of a thing. And the knowledge of it requires the knowledge of mathematics, reasoning, and dialectics. For those interested in mathematics and logic, this advanced education should be made available. And there would be a gradual progression. So the majority of them, all of them at least should have the initial education in music, art, and gymnastics. And then, depending upon their performances and interests, they would be further trained in mathematics and logic. Those who, show further interest in education would be trained in metaphysics and epistemology. Thus, those who withstand the rigorous training in logic and mathematics would be then trained to be philosopher-kings or become rulers.

For Plato, any knowledge requires the knowledge of mathematics. And even in his academia, the knowledge of mathematics was regarded as necessary for any metaphysical understanding or knowledge or wisdom or to develop the ability to know the things as they are. So, this is the

gradual progression of knowledge that should be made available to those who show interest. Gradually what happens, initial education should be given to everyone. Those who perform well and show interest should be taught mathematics and logic, and those who perform better in mathematics and logic then should be further trained in metaphysics and dialectics. And only they are capable of knowing what is good for society and then should be given the task of ruling, in other words, they could become the philosopher-king.

Plato distinguishes the ever-changing world of appearance from the reality. Most of us are guided by the appearance of a thing - what appears to us, to our sense perception. We merely respond to that and often form our knowledge based on such appearances. However, in the Platonic conception of knowledge, he distinguishes between the ever-changing world of appearance, which is a reality for many ordinary people, from the unchangeable or the permanent world of forms. So this is also called the *theory of forms*. For Plato, this form is the essence, or the absoluteness of a thing which is unchangeable. This knowledge of form is accessible only to the philosophers. And this you can understand, for example, by a chair and a table. So the chair is something on which we sit, and the table is something on which we keep something. We read, we type, we watch, and we put our laptop, the computer on the table, and we sit on the chair. So, this idea of the chair is absolute, unchangeable; however, its manifestation or appearance in the world could be imperfect. You could have a chair with two legs, three legs, four legs, in all kinds of formats, but the essential idea of the chair or the chairness is absolute, which is permanent and unchangeable.

This is a crude example to explain the absoluteness and permanent nature of a thing. But when we speculate about what is good for everyone, that requires a deeper, dialectical understanding of the world. And the use of mathematics and logic and reasoning is *sine-qua-non* for the understanding of good for society. This *theory of form* for Plato is more real than its manifestations in the real world. In other words, what we regard as real is merely appearance and what is real is the metaphysical understanding of that thing. So, the idea of a chair, idea of the good, idea of good conduct, the idea of truth, happiness, knowledge, and so on, you can keep it in that category.

Now in this context, we could also think about four kinds of knowledge, where two is of the inferior or lower kinds which guide ordinary understanding and knowledge. It is based on mere appearance and due to our ignorance of logic. Thus we regard appearance as true knowledge. For example, the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. This is scientifically speaking flawed

because the sun never rises, never sets. It is the earth which revolves around the sun, but for many that would be the knowledge of the movement of sun, or the planetary motion. Then the next is, within the inferior kinds of knowledge, those who are governed by the opinion or what is called the common sense of the time. So if you recall our discussion on justice, there are many arguments or definitions of justice, guided by the common-sensical understanding like paying once debt, being honest, being truthful, or justice is merely for the benefit of the stronger, so it is better to be unjust. All this understanding of justice is then guided by the opinion or the prevalent common sense of that time. Most of our knowledge is shaped by these common-sensical understanding that is prevalent in any society at any historical point of time. These are two inferior kinds of knowledge or low-order knowledge.

The higher-order knowledge requires then a move away from this common-sensical or ignorant knowledge to a more abstract or the metaphysical understanding of the world. It requires first the knowledge of logic and mathematics; and then the knowledge of good, and this knowledge of good is much different from the knowledge of form. One learns this two higher-order knowledge is when one trains one's mind in dialectics and mathematics. And you arrive at the understanding of good, or truth, or beauty through the philosophical intuitions. These types of knowledge, we can also understand with the *allegory of the cave*, where for many, the knowledge is based on the shadow that appears before them. But for the philosopher with their training in mathematics and reasoning, they alone are capable of perceiving what is absolute, what is truth, what is unchangeable.

This analogy is like, the men are sitting in a cave, facing the wall, and before them, there is the fire that is burning, and people are moving in and out between the fire and men sitting facing the wall. What appears to most of the men is the shadow of these moving objects or individual, and that shadow they realize as truth or as knowledge. Very few among them would turn around and look at the fire and then have a perhaps better understanding of that shadow, or the object. Still, fewer among them would move out of that cave and see the brightness, or the world outside. And first, they will be terrified by the brightness of that world, and they will alone have the exact or the absolute knowledge of the thing and the world. They may return to the cave, and they may not; they may be driven by the philosophical speculation or understanding of metaphysics, or knowledge for the sake of knowledge. But those who returned to their philosophical understanding, and these borders to mysticism, will have the knowledge of good. They can communicate to the ordinary people only in the allegory; because the knowledge of metaphysics or the whole world is inaccessible to the ordinary people using the prevalent

language. Philosopher-king would communicate to them in the allegory using certain objects and then trying to communicate. So, this is how the philosophers obtain the knowledge of a phenomena or a thing.

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The role of philosopher-king

- Philosophers, driven by their love for wisdom, alone are in possession of the true knowledge of what is (permanently) rather than what appears to be (momentarily) for many. And this knowledge made them suitable for the ruling. Plato was not only contemptuous of rule by the people or demos but feared the madness of many. Thus, his justifications for rule by reason or philosopher-king is an excellent defense of meritocracy. He wanted political power to be mixed with wisdom.
- Therefore, he argued that since philosophers alone possess the true knowledge, hence should be given the responsibility of ruling/governing. S/He will exercise this power wisely to bring about harmony of existence and good in the state. In exercising this power, philosopher-kings are not constrained by any laws. Thus, they are sovereign and exercise unrestrained power. S/He should exercise this power for maintaining harmony and order in the state, thereby ensuring the welfare of the all.
- Now the question before Plato was – 'who will guard the guardians (*quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*)'. Plato puts only one restriction on the guardian class that is they would not have private lives or property. He argues that this class, driven by wisdom or intellect and concerned about the wellbeing or good of all, should not be distracted by the pursuit of gold or goods. They are happy in the happiness of others; hence they will consider the whole state as their family and property. They will live communal lives with minimal possessions. Plato gives a very detailed account of such lives of guardians, widely known as the communism of wives and property. We will discuss it in detail in the next lecture.

Now, what is the role of philosopher-kings? Philosophers are driven by their love for wisdom and they alone have true knowledge. They are trained in mathematics and reasoning. And they alone know what *is* permanent rather than what *appears to be* momentarily for many. This knowledge made them suitable for ruling. Plato was not only contemptuous of rule by the people or the demos; but feared the madness of many driven by their momentary desires and passions. If you recall, the decision to poison Socrates, was initiated by the democratic rulers in Athens. Thus Plato believed that the democratic rule was primarily driven by popular desire or the passions which are detrimental to the order and stability of the state. It leads to the constant change, turbulence in the state and polity. And to avoid that, we need a ruler who would know the thing *as it is* then things as it *appears to be* for many. Thus his justification for rule by reason or philosopher King is also an excellent defence of meritocracy in Plato. Those who have the merit or the knowledge should be given the responsibility of ruling. He wanted political power, therefore, to be mixed with wisdom. The best polity is that where political power is mixed with wisdom. In other words, the wise men are given the responsibility of ruling.

Therefore, he argued that since philosophers alone possess the true knowledge; hence, they should be given the task or responsibility of ruling and governing. The philosopher could be a male or a female as well. She or he will exercise this power wisely to bring about harmony of

existence and good in the state. In exercising this power, philosopher-kings are not constrained by any laws. Thus, in the Platonic conception of an ideal state, there are no restrictions; there are no constraints on philosopher king. That means, s/he is the absolute sovereign and exercise unrestrained power.

As there is no conflict in society, the whole purpose of having philosopher-king is to ensure the harmony of existence. And if there is the harmony of existence, there is no need for the law to arbitrate between the conflicting groups or factions in society. The philosopher-king would have unrestrained power; there would not be any laws that will restrain his exercise of power. S/he would exercise this power for maintaining the harmony and order in the state, thereby ensuring the welfare of all and maximum happiness for each.

Now the question before Plato was, who would guard the guardians? This remain the major challenge for our times too - who will watch the watchman? This also remains a riddle for many states and polities. Those who are given the task of auditing, who will account for their performance or their activities? In Greek, it is called *quis custodet ipsos custodes* (who will guard the guardians). Plato argues that, after the elaborate training in mathematics, reasoning, and dialectics, only those who perform well, or have the knowledge of metaphysics should be given the responsibility of ruling. And once that responsibility is given, there should not be any restraint, as this philosopher will be driven by wisdom or intellect alone. He put, however, only one restriction to this guardian class that they would not have any private property or a family. He debars the guardian class from having any private property, which is to be enjoyed only by the producing classes or those who are in the business or trading.

He argued that this guardian class, driven by wisdom or intellect, and concerned about the well-being or good of all, should not be distracted by the pursuit of gold or goods. They are happy in the happiness of others; hence, they would consider the whole state as their family and property. They would live a kind of communal lives with minimal possessions. Plato gives a very detailed account of such lives of guardians, widely known as the communism of wives and property. We will discuss in detail the communism of wives and property in the next class. So that is the only restraint that Plato put on the guardian classes in the conception of his ideal state. Now, before we discuss Plato's second-best state, we should also know his cyclical view of history.

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The cyclical view of the history of political thought

- Plato understood that no matter how assiduously the state is ruled or governed, its ruling class, over the years, would become corrupt. And that would lead to gradual decay and eventual transformations in the form of the state or polity. Such transformations start from the best to worst ruled/governed state. Plato had a cyclical rather than a linear view of these changes. Such changes were, to a great extent, governed by the natural principle of birth-progress-degeneration-and then rebirth.
- These changes are the result of the change in the rulers with distinctive souls. He starts with the city ruled by the philosophers as the best and ideal type. This he describes in *Republic* and calls it *aristocracy* where men of wisdom rule. It degenerates into *timocracy* when men of honor guided by the spirit called upon to rule. It further degenerates into the rule of rich, which is an *oligarchy*. The love for money governs this corrupt system of rule. *Oligarchy* further declines into *democracy* – the rule of people which Plato despised. It is driven by the everchanging desires or instincts of the masses and eventually leads to *tyranny*. A tyrant rules for the perpetuation of his rule rather than the welfare of all. He leads a miserable life, constantly fearful of deceptions and betrayals from his/her companions and subordinates.
- Thus, Plato argues that rule by wise-men is best. The happiest men are those who search after wisdom and knowledge of good. They ensure the welfare of all and seek happiness in the happiness of others. Plato considers *tyranny* as the worst form of rule and tyrants as least happy among all the rulers of different forms of state/polity. He wanted them to become philosophers for their happiness and welfare of all.

6

Plato understood that no matter how assiduously, or how effectively the state is ruled or governed; how justly or effectively or assiduously the state is ruled; its ruling class over the years would become corrupt, because of the many influences – money, self-indulgent behaviours or habits and so on. Thus over the years, all forms of state, and it's just rule, will degenerate and decay. It would lead to gradual decay and eventual transformations in the form of the state or polity from an ideal to a corrupt state. Such transformations are from the best to the worst ruled or governed state. Plato, in his understanding of changes and transformation in the forms of state, has the cyclical view of change. And such changes were guided by the natural principles of birth, progress, degeneration, and again rebirth. This is a cyclical movement. Plato's understanding of the changes and transformation taking place in nature or the forms of the state is also the cyclical view of change. And these changes are the result of the changes in the rulers with distinctive souls. When there is a change in the rulers with distinctive souls, it will correspond to the change in the forms of state as well. Plato argues that the state ruled by the philosophers are the best and ideal state. And this he describes in *Republic* and calls it aristocracy. It is a system of rule where wise or those who have wisdom are given the responsibility of ruling. And they rule for the benefit of all ensuring the maximum happiness of each.

Plato starts his ideal type of state with aristocracy that he describes in *Republic*. It is rule by the wise man or the philosopher-king. It gradually degenerate into what is called timocracy, when men of honour, who are guided by the spirit called upon to rule. So when the rulers become those who love honour and are guided by spirit, the eventual transformation of the city-

states leads to timocracy. When there is degeneration in the timocracy, that means when the rich and those who have a love for money becomes the ruler; it leads to a new form of state which is called oligarchy, which is ruled by few rich and they govern for their love for money. These are corrupt systems of rule from aristocracy to timocracy and then to oligarchy. Oligarchy further degenerates into democracy, which is the rule of people or rule by the many, which Plato despised. Precisely because this rule by the many, which is democracy and for many of us in contemporary times, democracy is the best form of government; Plato consider it as corrupt. In his opinion it is worse then oligarchy, because it is driven by the ever-changing desires or instinct of the masses that eventually leads to tyranny and that is the worst form of state.

In this cyclical view of the change in the forms of state, the best form for Plato is an aristocracy, then timocracy, then oligarchy, then democracy and further down, and the worst form is the tyranny. A tyrant rules for the perpetuation of his rule, rather than the welfare for all. And a tyrant leads the most miserable life, constantly fearful of deceits and betrayals, from his or her own companions and subordinates. Therefore, he wanted the tyrants to become the philosopher. Plato argues that the rule by the wise men is best, and the happiest men are those who search after wisdom and knowledge of good. They ensure the welfare of all and seek happiness in the happiness of others. And Plato considers tyranny as the worst form of rule, and tyrants as least happy among all the rulers of different forms of state and polity. He wanted them to become philosophers, for their happiness lie in welfare of all.

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Statesman & Laws: Plato's second-best state

- Plato, in his later works, realized the difficulties of establishing the rule of philosopher-king or ideal state in the real world. He may have led to such belief as a result of his failures in converting the tyrant of Syracuse into the philosopher-king. Thus, in *Statesman and Laws*, he describes a state which would be ruled by laws and mixed constitutions.
- This would be a small state of about 5040 male citizens living along with their families, slaves, and resident aliens. The administrative structure of this polity would be divided into – Nocturnal Council consisting of wisest men at the top; Guardians of the laws below them – ten of whom to be part of Nocturnal Council as well; below them are the executive council of 360 as well as an assembly which is comprised of all citizens. All public offices – open to both men and women, are to be filled by elections and few through lottery. There would be provisions for public scrutiny of every official.
- Thus, Plato's second-best state is governed by both wisest men as well as laws and constitutions. Unlike philosopher-king who were accountable to none except his reason, the ruling class in this state is to be open for public scrutiny. However, Plato did not completely do away with his preference for wise men and the role of reason in governing the state. His best state remains the state ruled by the philosopher king; he modified it somewhat in *Statesman and Laws* to make it realizable.

Now, let's discuss Plato's second-best state. Plato, in his later works, realizes the difficulties of establishing the rule of philosopher king, or ideal state in the actual world. He might have led to such belief as a result of his own failures in converting the tyrant of Syracuse into a philosopher king. Therefore, in his later works, *Statesman* and *Laws*, Plato describes a state which is governed by laws and a mixed constitution. This would be a small state of about 5040 male citizens living along with their families, slaves, and resident aliens doing their respective tasks. The administrative structure of this polity would be divided into the Nocturnal council consisting of wisest men at the top, guardians of the laws below them, 10 of whom would be part of this Nocturnal council as well. And below them are the executive council of 360 and also an assembly, which is comprised of all the citizens.

In this state, all public offices are again open to both male and female and to be filled by elections, however few offices are to be filled through the lottery as well, and there would be provisions for public scrutiny of every official. Thus Plato's second-best state is governed by both wisest men as well as the laws and constitutions. Unlike philosopher-king, who was accountable to none except their own reason and intellect, the ruling class in this state is to be open for public scrutiny. However, Plato did not completely do away with his preference of wise men, and also the role of reason in governing the state. And therefore, we will see the administrative structure is governed at the top by the knowledgeable or wise.

Thus, Plato's best state remains the state ruled by the philosopher king as he discussed it in *Republic*, but he modified it in *Statesman* and *Laws* to make it realizable, which we call the second-best state of Plato.

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Concluding Remarks

- His ideal state remains a utopia. However, it could still guide how to govern the state wisely and in a just manner. His system of education influenced many thinkers, such as Rousseau and rulers. His ideas did shape the polity of European politics of the medieval era and many other monarchies, of course, under the disguise of religious myths. Still, society and polity did reflect the Platonic conception of three classes and their corresponding virtues and roles.
- Aristotle was very critical of Plato's ideal state. He regarded it elitist and questioned the premise of absoluteness of the truth or wisdom accessible to the philosophers alone. Instead, Aristotle believed in the wisdom of many. However, he accepted the form of state described in *Laws* and *Statesman*. Thus, many scholars have argued that Plato's second-best state was Aristotle's best-state. Aristotle also criticized his understanding of politics as *apolitical*. Scholars like Alan Ryan would call it even *antipolitical* in the absence of conflicts and laws.
- Similarly, Marx envisioned a polity without politics and conflicts in the state of communism. Many scholars like Karl Popper charged him of being an enemy of the open society and the forerunner of a totalitarian state. However, his idea of the philosopher-king did influence many generations of rulers and thinkers alike. His ideal of justice and how to govern a polity that enables everyone to reach his or her fullest potentialities continue to inspire many.

Now, to conclude this lecture, Plato's ideal state governed by philosopher-king remains a *utopia*; however, it could still guide how to govern the states wisely and in a just manner. So for many, the business of ruling and governing is to ensure the welfare of many. And to ensure the welfare of many requires the knowledge which is distinct from other kinds of knowledge or the common-sensical understanding of what is good. His system of education influenced many thinkers such as Rousseau and monarchs, particularly in Victorian England, in training the bureaucrats for ensuring the benefits of everyone.

Even in contemporary society, the bureaucrat is supposed to function for maximizing the benefit and welfare of the others in the state. And to train them, the philosophical system of education that Plato had, has influenced a great many rulers and thinkers as well. So his ideas did shape the polity of European states during the medieval era and many other monarchies as well, of course, under the disguise of religious myth or the divine right of the king. If you look at the nature of major monarchies during the medieval times, the society and polity were divided into three classes. The majority were producing classes of farmers, craftsmen, traders at the bottom. Above them were the auxiliaries classes or the warlords, who were fewer than those who were at the bottom. And at the top was the rule of clergymen or the king. The hierarchy of the polity in the medieval times and also in the other monarchies you will find the influence or reflection of Platonic three classes.

Only in modern times, we began to assert the equality of everyone. That struggle is still going on, and society is still conflicted with many differences in terms of wealth, social position, and other kinds of hierarchies based on religion, caste, and so on.

If you look at the critical assessment of the Platonic ideal of state and philosopher-king, we have to start with Aristotle, who was his disciple, was very critical of Plato's ideal state. He regarded it as elitist. And as we know, Plato always preferred the philosopher-king over the other classes. However, Aristotle questioned the premise of absoluteness of truth and wisdom that is accessible only to the philosopher.

Aristotle's idea is that the knowledge or wisdom is many sided. There could not be any absolute idea of truth or right; we approach it through many standpoints and the knowledge of many when they come together, the knowledge becomes much more pragmatic, realizable than the knowledge of the absolute metaphysical understanding that Plato argues about and makes available only to the philosophers. Thus Aristotle believed in the wisdom of many; however, he accepted the forms of state described in *Laws* and *Statesman*, and thus many scholars argue that Plato's second-best state was Aristotle's best-state. Aristotle also criticized Plato's understanding of politics as *apolitical*, and scholars like Alan Ryan would call it anti-political in the absence of conflicts.

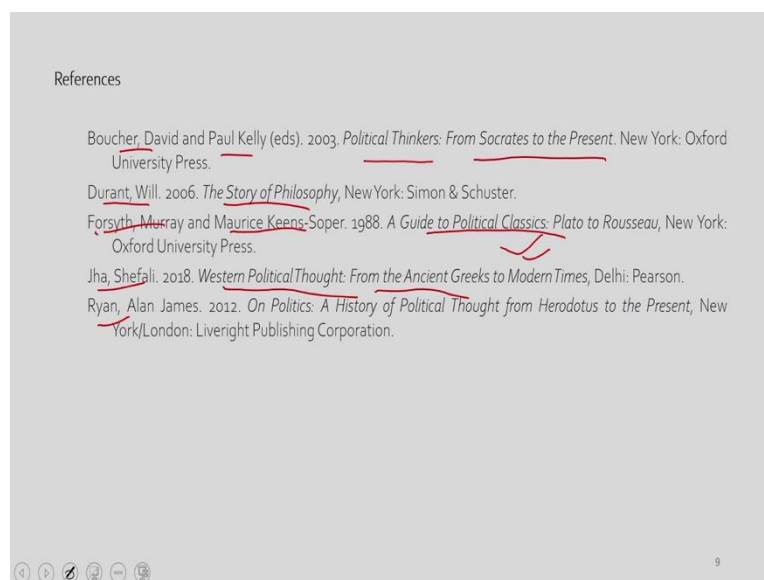
The whole purpose of politics, as Aristotle explains it and we understand it, is to resolve the conflicts through discussions and debates. However, for Plato, the whole conception of politics is about the existence of harmony, and how to ensure that harmony. Therefore, he gives the absolute power to the philosopher-king. However, the actual pragmatic politics are driven by conflicts, and the art of politics is to resolve those conflicts without resorting to violence, without using the coercive means, through discussion and debates. Thus the understanding of politics as driven by conflicts is absent in the Platonic conception of the ideal state or the rule by the philosopher king. And that makes him anti-political according to Alan Ryan, or apolitical by Aristotle. However, if you look at the platonic conception of ideal state and absence of conflict, some scholars and thinkers were guided by this conception of polity and state, most notable among them is Karl Marx. He envisioned the idea of communism, that would be the absence of politics and our sense of state, and there would be absolute harmony among everyone.

Many scholars also criticize Plato for his totalitarian thinking and giving the philosopher-king absolute power. Karl Popper charged Plato for being an enemy of the open society and the forerunner of a totalitarian state. Many tyrants or autocratic ruler in the later years justified their rule or sought legitimacy for their rule in the name of ensuring the good of everyone or the welfare of everyone. Karl Popper, therefore, charged him for being the enemy of the open

society or the forerunner of a totalitarian state. However, his idea of the philosopher-king continue to influence many generations of rulers and thinkers alike.

His ideal of justice and how to govern a polity that enables everyone to realise his or her fullest potentialities continue to inspire many. And in Plato, we have many progressive and radical ideas like public offices should be made available to both men and women, which was very radical from the prevailing patriarchal norms of that society. So, there are many valid criticisms against Plato. There are limits to his understanding of politics. Nonetheless, his ideals of philosopher-king or rule by the wise men who are non-discriminated against based on gender, and other criteria are something that continued to inspire many thinkers and rulers alike.

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This is all that I wanted to discuss with you on Plato's idea on philosopher king and the ideal state. For this, you can refer to some of these books like David Boucher and Paul Kelly, *Political Thinkers: From Socrates to Present*. Will Durant will also give you a broader understanding of Plato's philosophy. Then you can also refer to Murray Forsyth and Maurice Keens-Soper, particularly to understand his conception of knowledge or system of education and the way he differentiates between appearance and the real.

You can also refer to Shefali Jha and Alan Ryan; Shefali Jha's *Western Political Thought* is an excellent textbook to understand many other thinkers and their ideas including the one we have discussed today. Similarly, James Allen Ryan gives a lucid explanation of the anti-political strands in the Platonic vision of politics and states. that is all for today's lecture. I hope you enjoyed it. Do share your feedback. Thanks for listening. Thank you all.