

BLOCK II

PLATO

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BLOCK II INTRODUCTION

Plato is very often regarded as the founder of Western Political Philosophy. In particular, he is seen as an innovator of philosophical idealism as he argued that there is a universal idea in the world of eternal reality which is beyond the world of senses (Theory of Forms). Plato was the first thinker to formulate and define political ideas within a larger framework of a philosophical idea of Good. With a rigorous and systematic examination of ethical, political, metaphysical, and epistemological issues, he set the bar very high for future generations of political philosophers. He used the dialectic method in his writings. He himself never appears or speaks in the dialogues while the readers are urged to think for themselves about the issues discussed in the dialogue. It is often assumed that the main character, Socrates (or a few others), spoke for Plato's position. Plato also laid the foundations of Greek political theory which later became the bedrock of Western political traditions. Plato's most influential book, the *Republic*, seeks to answer the question – what is justice and whether it is a desirable virtue for people and states. Since it deals with an ideal concept, the book has been often called a utopian work of philosophy. There has been no dearth of his critics who see Plato as someone who stood against progressive and democratic ideals and as a frontrunner of totalitarianism. Despite this, the centrality of Plato to Western political philosophy can be gauged from Karl Popper's statement that "Western thought one might say has been either Platonic or anti-Platonic but hardly ever non-platonic." This block covers Plato's ideas in three units – Unit 2: Theory of Forms and the Idea of Philosopher King, Unit 3: Justice and Unit 4: Education.

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UNIT 2 PLATO: THEORY OF FORMS AND THE IDEA OF PHILOSOPHER KING*

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Theory of Forms
 - 2.2.1 Allegory of Cave
- 2.3 The Idea of Philosopher King
 - 2.3.1 Who is a Philosopher?
 - 2.3.2 Ideal State and the Role of Philosopher
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- 2.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.5 References
- 2.6 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

2.0 OBJECTIVE

In this unit, you will be reading about the concept of Ideas of Form as described by Plato. The Unit also presents an introduction to the idea of Philosopher King. After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the Theory of Forms
- Enumerate the Idea of Philosopher King
- Discuss the Ideal State and the role a Philosopher plays in it.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Plato (c.428-347 B.C.) is one of the most important figures of the Ancient Greek world and in the history of Western thought. Political philosophy in the West begins with the ancient Greeks and Plato. Plato was one of the most influential authors in the history of western philosophy. In his written dialogues, he expanded on the ideas and techniques of his teacher Socrates. Plato's recurring theme of writing was the distinction between ideal forms and everyday experience, and how it played out both for individuals and for societies. In the *Republic*, his most famous work, he envisioned a civilization governed not by lowly appetites, but by the pure wisdom of a philosopher-king.

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Expanding on the idea that the world that appears to our senses is in ways imperfect and filled with error, but there is a more real and perfect realm, populated by entities called “forms” or “ideas” that are eternal and changeless. In Plato's writings, it is often asserted that the true philosophers are those who recognize the importance of distinguishing the one from the other and in a position to become ethically superior to unenlightened human beings, because of the greater degree of insight they can acquire. In the following sections, Plato's theory of ideas is discussed to understand the form of good. It also looks at how a Philosopher is different from others and why he should be the one to rule the ideal state.

2.2 THEORY OF FORMS

Influenced by the tradition of scepticism, the early Greek philosophers were aware of the fact that the world was constantly undergoing change and that nothing was permanent. This was also reflected in the *Socratic Dialogues* of Plato, where he argues that because the material world is changeable it was unreliable. For him, behind this unreliable world of appearances there was a world of permanence and reliability. He called this world as “world of forms or ideas”. Plato's Theory of Forms can be considered as the first metaphysical debate in the western political thought. In his Theory of Forms, Plato explores the structure of reality and questions what this reality is as opposed to what it appears to be. He concluded that everything in the world was only a copy of a perfect form existing in the realm attainable to us through contemplation.

For Plato, the ideas or forms are abstract representation of things around us which are timeless in nature as they are unchangeable, eternal, intelligible, divine, and incorporeal. On the other hand, physical things are existing things but are changeable, finite, perceptible, corporeal, and are caused by the forms. The Theory of Forms typically refers to Plato's belief that the material world as it seems to us is not the real world, but only a shadow of the real world. One of the key ideas in Plato's theory of form is its correlation to the theory of knowledge. Like Socrates, Plato believed that knowledge could be acquired and he postulated that it has two characteristics of knowledge. First, knowledge must be certain and infallible. Second, knowledge must have as its object that which is genuinely real as contrasted with that which is an appearance only. The real must be fixed, permanent, and unchanging.

According to Plato, philosophers were able to comprehend the Form of Good through their intellect, and this served as the basis for what he believed as ideal society. He saw the world divided into two realms – the material world of appearances which was ever-changing and imperfect and second, was the world of ‘forms’ which was perfect and unchanging. He argued that everything in the first realm was only a copy of the perfect form in the perfect realm. He further argues that material realm was perceived through our senses while the realm of forms could only be perceived through intellect and contemplation. Plato was of the opinion that philosophers can transcend material world and understand the

forms of virtue, justice and goodness and for precisely this reason, Plato opined that the philosophers were the best to rule the ideal society.

This was so because according to Plato, true and reliable knowledge rests only with those who are able to comprehend true reality that is hidden behind the reality of everyday. Therefore, to perceive this world of Forms, individual needs to undergo extensive education. From this idea of forms, the concept of philosopher kings emerges who were required to perceive the true reality and the form of good so as to be well-informed rulers. Plato further uses the Allegory of Cave to explain the relations with the world of form.

2.2.1 Allegory of Cave

Allegory of Cave is a dialogue between Socrates and his disciple Glaucon. During the dialogue, Socrates asks Glaucon to imagine people living in an underground cave, which is only open to the outside at the end of a difficult ascent. Most of the people in the cave are prisoners chained facing the back wall of the cave so that they can neither move nor turn their heads. A fire burns behind them, and all the prisoners can see are the shadows playing on the wall in front of them. There are others in the cave, carrying objects, but all the prisoners see are their shadows. Some of the others speak, but there are echoes in the cave that make it difficult for the prisoners to understand which person is saying what. Socrates goes on to describe the difficulties a prisoner might have adapting to being freed. When he sees that there are solid objects in the cave, not just shadows, he is confused. Instructors can tell him that what he saw before was an illusion, but at first, he will assume his shadow life was the reality. Eventually, as he leaves and steps into the sun, he is painfully dazzled by its brightness, and stunned by the beauty of the moon and the stars. Once he becomes accustomed to the light, he will pity the people in the cave and would want to stay above and apart from them. The new arrival will choose to remain in the light, but, according to Socrates, he must not. Because for true enlightenment, to understand and apply what is goodness and justice, he must descend back into the darkness of the cave and join the men chained to the wall, and share his newly acquired knowledge with them.

The allegory of the cave has deep allegorical meaning because variety of symbolic suggestions are used in this writing. The dark cave symbolically suggests the contemporary world of ignorance and the chained people symbolize ignorant. The raised wall symbolizes the limitation of their thinking and the shadow symbolically suggest the world of sensory perception which Plato considers an illusion. In his opinion, the appearance is false and reality is somewhere, which we cannot see. For Plato, the appearing world is just the imitation of the real world. The shadows represent such imitation and, the reality is possible to know with the spiritual knowledge. The chains symbolize our limitation in this material world so that we do not understand the true reality. The outer world of the light symbolically suggests the world of spiritual reality, which we achieve by breaking the chains that are used to tie us. The dazzling of the eyes for the first time symbolizes difficulty to accept ignorance after knowing the

reality. Hence, in allegory of the cave Plato has given a criticism of human's limited existence in the material world. In Allegory of the cave, Plato also described about the perception. He says that there are two types of perception: sensory perception and spiritual perception. Sensory perception is the world of appearance, which we perceive, with the help of our sensory organs. For this, world is the world of illusion or shadows, thereby a world of falsehood. The reality or truth is impossible to perceive with our senses, it is possible through spiritual perception, which is divine enlightenment. Spiritual perception is possible when we reject the world of sensory perception and break all the material chains.

In short, in his book, *Republic*, Plato uses the allegory of Cave to explain the relations with the world of forms. He uses analogy of people who have spent their while life living in a cave. They have only seen shadows on the wall created by their campfire. Compared with the reality of the world of Forms, real physical objects and events are equivalent to being only shadows. Plato also takes the opportunity to state that only those people who have the ability to step out into the sunlight and see the true reality (which are the Forms) should rule. Plato leaves no doubt that only special people are fit to rule. He describes the ideal ruler is a philosopher-king, because only philosophers have the ability to discern the Forms. Plato goes on to say that it is only when such a person comes to power that the citizens of the state will have the opportunity to step out of the cave and see the light.

2.3 THE IDEA OF PHILOSOPHER KING

The theory of philosopher king was the linchpin of Plato's Ideal State. It was derived from the conviction that the philosopher has the knowledge, intellect and training to govern, ruling, like any other task, required skill and qualifications, for its aim was the general well-being of all. A good ruler was one who not only preserved the lives of his subjects; but also transformed them as human beings. The most important and distinctive feature of the Ideal State is the philosophic rule or the 'rule of the philosophic king.'

2.3.1 Who is a Philosopher King?

Throughout the *Republic*, Plato emphasises the importance of having rulers who know the form of good. Plato holds that a philosopher by his grasp of the idea of good was best qualified to rule, implying that knowledge could be obtained only by a select few who had the leisure and the material comforts. Plato shared the general Greek perception that leisure was essential for the pursuit of wisdom. A philosopher would be able to administer justice and act for the good of the community. He would have a good character, a calm disposition and a sound mind. He would have the qualities of a ruler namely truthfulness, high-mindedness, discipline and courage. Plato in *The Republic* insisted that politics and philosophy ought to be safe from one another. A philosopher ruler would make wise legislator and frame laws in accordance with the Idea of Good, thereby linking statecraft with soulcraft. For Plato, Ideal State ruled by

philosopher king was a divine institution perfectly worthy of emulation and imitation. He defined ideal state as one based on timeless and unchanging principles, suggesting that an ideal pattern existed which could be discerned and employed to reform a diseased polity, and transform into a thing of beauty. He implied that political order was highly malleable and could be moulded in order to receive the right imprint.

Since the work of the ruler requires knowledge of the forms, the instillation of such knowledge is a significant concern of the state. To Plato, entrusting the state to rulers without this knowledge would be like turning it over to blind. Though the philosophers prefer not to, they must be persuaded to rule. The philosophic curriculum is an institutionalised means of creating successors to the existing rulers. It is only when successors have been brought up and educated can the existing rulers unshoulder their burden and return to the realm of philosophy. According to Plato, the philosophers must undergo a rigorous program of education and then, spend fifteen years performing administrative servile in the city, before they are raised to glimpse the form of the good, which gives them perfect knowledge and completes their education.

In the *Republic*, Plato does not explain how philosophic wisdom is beneficial to the state. In fact, what the rulers of the state actually do and what they must know in order to do it, it is to be seen that the knowledge of the good is not discreetly required. The rulers main task is moulding souls. In order to succeed at this, they require detailed knowledge of human psychology. They must know proper propositions of mental and physical training to be applied in different types of personalities. They must understand different types of art. This knowledge must cover not only poetry but music and all the visual and other arts as well. The rulers must know how to devise the crucial series of task for aspiring ruler, how to weed out those unfit to rule and how to recognise and elevate superior members of the producing class. They must also devise means, preferably educational, to insure the loyalty of the lowest class, and thereby, spread contentment throughout the state.

The ruler must know eugenics, how to breed the best and how to rig the maturing lotteries towards this end. They must be able to keep the population stable. Various political skills are required for this task. Plato declares that the guardians must be versed in war. They must also be able to negotiate effectively with other states, including scheming to subvert potential enemies. There are other tasks as well for the rulers, such as avoiding great disparities between wealth and poverty. Thus, in order to rule the ideal state, the guardians require a formidable array of knowledge, skills and talent. Plato, here, fails to exactly explain how knowledge of the good contributes to the talents required by the ruler.

Yet, he does recognise the importance of rulers' knowing more than the good. Plato insists that they should be of superior knowledge, at the same time also not be deficient in practical experience. Plato devises means to provide experience. The clearest provision is that the philosopher must spend fifteen years in administrative service in the city, before they are given final knowledge and led

up to contemplate the good. The Republic also mentions the military applications of the philosopher's training. The study of arithmetic, geometry and even astronomy are all explicitly recommended in this regard. Knowledge of these subjects is required if the rulers are to be able to properly marshal their troops, construct encampments and array their forces for battle. Plato also pays attention to war, where he recommends that the guardian be exposed to battle at an early age just as the children of other craftsmen are exposed to their craft at an early age. For rulers as well as the auxiliaries, war will be an important matter of concern. Although Plato is aware that the knowledge of good is not a sufficient condition for being able to rule, in his political theory there is a significant gap because of his failure to explain exactly how knowledge of the form of the good is relevant in governing. Even so, Plato has his reasons for insisting that knowledge of good is a necessary condition for effective rule. To him, its moral effects are indispensable. It helps in training for philosophers to despise things of the world and gives superior value to the rulers. Thus, the importance of Plato's emphasis on the philosopher's having absolute knowledge can be defended more in regard to the moral than the cognitive effect of such knowledge. Philosophers, therefore, must rule not because of the practical value of their absolute knowledge but because absolute knowledge, ensures proper values.

Philosophic knowledge, whatever be the contents and applicability to the concerns of the rulers, it nevertheless supplies the state with an active probing, critical intelligence. This is an important theme in the *Republic* of Plato. However it is to be seen that Plato's view entails a renunciation of the Socratic faith in moral autonomy. To Plato, justice as virtue is bound up with balance and harmony, the predominant rule of reason and control of appetite. Here, Plato sets aside the Socratic ideal of each individual caring for his own soul, because according to Plato, an individual can achieve this condition only through intensive conditioning. The introduction of the theory of forms also leads Plato to oppose Socrates's belief in the limited power of human knowledge. To Plato, the most exhaustive truths are accessible to only the highly privileged few. Since the philosopher can reach these heights, many must be enslaved to the few in order to benefit by divine intelligence, thus, the state as a whole is wise through the wisdom of the philosophers.

Thus, Plato departs from Socrates' commitment to critical rationalism. The philosopher in the Republic knows the truths of "all times and all existence". The philosopher kings will bring such knowledge to bear in ruling the state they govern according to the dictates of their exalted knowledge. Plato shapes his ideal state around the presence of an active critical intelligence. Plato argues in the *Statesman* that the ruler is like a doctor who has no compulsion on abiding by his prescriptions previously written should the condition of the patient demand a change of treatment, the true ruler too would not feel bound to abide by the laws, but is superior because he can adapt to changed circumstances.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. What are qualities of the Philosopher King described by Plato?

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2.3.2 Ideal State and the Role of Philosopher

As the philosopher has undergone the programme of studies as defined in *The Republic*, Plato has left the task of structuring the society in the hands of the philosopher. Many aspects of the state are therefore left incomplete, sketched broadly leaving the details for the rulers to fill in. For instance, they must determine the extent to which the state can safely expand beyond its original borders, and the number of marriages needed to keep the male population stable. They must formulate the program of trials and tests through which the perfect guardians are selected from their fellows. Regarding early education, Plato presents only broad outlines, while the specific details are the responsibility of the guardian. Thus, the rulers are empowered to fill in what the original founders have left out. Because they possess exalted knowledge, Plato believes it is possible for them to evaluate and criticise the state. They can alter features that do not work.

Therefore, the central elements in the ideal state are subject to revision and reviews. Thus, philosophers are to play the role of an active critical intelligence in governing the state. As in the analogy presented in the *Statesman*, the philosophers have the knowledge of the doctor who writes the prescriptions and not just of the pharmacist who carries them out. They are not merely to shape their surroundings according to a blueprint that is given. They must take appropriate measures where the blueprint is found incomplete or faulty as well as when the circumstances change. The problem that arises with this view of the philosopher as active critical intelligence is that it seems difficult to understand how the philosophers can maintain open critical attitude when Plato has described them in mystical terms as doing their work with an eye on the idea of forms when knowledge comes to them in a sudden burst of life. As Popper and Burke point out, if the role of a philosopher is to enforce the divinely sanctioned laws, how could he criticise and change them? However, when Plato is portraying the philosopher king as shaping the state according to the forms, the forms he looks to are those of moral qualities – justice, beauty, moderation, the good itself and not the forms of the ideal state. The task of the philosopher king is to embody these moral qualities in men’s souls while the means to this end must

be fabricated. How to shape the political institution for the desired outcome is a problem to the solution of which they are not given metaphysical guidance.

Thus, the philosopher king bears responsibility for devising the institutional structure of the state. Even if they are given a divinely grounded aim, they are not given divine guidance concerning the means. Hence, philosopher bears a critical, open minded attitude towards the laws and institutions of the ideal state. Another reason for this quality in philosopher king is because of their unwillingness to rule. They love contemplation of the eternal forms more than political power. Therefore, they would not be afflicted by the common rulers' fear of making changes. They are willing to criticise and reform the state in order to improve it. Thus, the central motif of the political theory of the Republic is putting the philosophic intelligence in control of the state. Although, Plato fails to explain how the philosophic wisdom is beneficial to the state, his insistence that they possess this appears to express the ideal that the state be governed by the highest of the truths. Thus, the political theory of the Republic centres on the rule of the state by supreme intelligence. For Plato, philosophers must be kings because only they can discover what must be done. The rulers maintain some measure of moral autonomy, and they do not merely accept the structure and institutions of the state as metaphysically grounded. They are to understand the state's rational basis and alter and improve things whenever and wherever necessary.

2.3.3 Criticism

One of the most common criticisms is that Plato has little to say about how the philosopher's knowledge actually enables them to rule. In other words, how is this knowledge necessary for ruling the state? Aristotle criticises the kind of moral knowledge supplied by the form of good. He criticises it on two grounds – first, vagueness and second, the apparent uselessness of such knowledge. In the first place, it is vague because it is difficult to say exactly what the form of good is and what knowledge of it would entail. According to the theory of forms, the forms of good must exemplify some quality or set of qualities common to all things. However, things may be called 'good' in many different ways such as good book, good runner etc. It is difficult to isolate one specific sense of good common to all these uses. To many philosophers, good is used always in reference to a set of criteria specific to its object, which differs in different kinds of cases. But if as Plato believes the form of good supplies the intelligible principle according to which all things are ordered, it is difficult to explain the precise connections between the various senses in which things are called 'good' and their role in the rational pattern of things.

Second, since the connection between the form of the good and real world is indefinite, it is difficult to identify the practical value of knowing the forms. As Aristotle puts it, people engaged in different activities do not see the value in knowing the good for their work. For example, a weaver is not interested in the good, but only in making cloth. They are only interested in the specific criteria of goodness in their arts rather than the good by itself. The role the good plays in their art is difficult to specify. Moreover, craftsmen attain professionally in their

fields through study of the objects of their crafts, and not through studying metaphysics. Therefore, Aristotle gives importance to practicing wisdom. For him, practical wisdom is concerned with the needs and interests of particular individual in particular situation and deals with the concrete. The man of practical wisdom is able to assess particular situation in order to decide which rule to apply.

Another criticism can be that Plato denied participation of the average person in politics and decision making process. He defined citizenship not as participation, but in terms of shared benefits flowing from that principle because to allow participation would be to pave the way for the government by opinion. It can be argued that by denying the participation of average person, Plato was trying to prevent any opposition or dissent in his ideal state. He justified this exclusion on the grounds that it could lead to factionalism whereas the ideal society should promote the common good. Plato rejected majoritarianism and participation on the grounds that ordinary person did not have the capacity to comprehend absolute truth and the idea of good.

The platonic ideals were criticised by Aristotle as well for confusing unity with harmony. If a political community was tightly organised unified, it would cease to be a political association. The essence of a state was its diversity, making it different from organisations. The state and family represented two different kinds of organisations and both ought to remain that way without either imitating the other. In view of the nature of the state and governance, it would be better for a ruler to be worldly wise than to be wise in the world of ideas.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. Critically analyse Plato’s idea of Philosopher King.

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2.4 LET US SUM UP

One of Plato’s most influential contributions to philosophy is the Theory of Forms. In basic terms, Plato's Theory of Forms asserts that the physical world is not the ‘real’ world; instead, true reality exists beyond our physical world. Plato’s philosophy asserts that there are two realms: the physical realm and the spiritual realm. The physical realm is the material stuff we see and interact with on a daily

basis; this physical realm is changing and imperfect. On the other hand, the spiritual realm exists beyond this physical realm. Plato calls this spiritual realm the Realm of Forms. Plato's Theory of Forms asserts that the physical realm is only a shadow, or image, of the true reality of the Realm of Forms. This is also a recurring theme in idea of the Philosopher King. Throughout the Republic, Plato emphasises the importance of having rulers who know the form of good. Plato holds that philosopher by his grasp of the idea of good was best qualified to rule. An important theme of Plato's social and political thought, especially of the *Republic*, is that philosophy alone offers true power - it is also the way to knowledge. The philosopher knows the forms and the ideals. He alone is fit to rule because for 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 size and purity and unity of the state.

2.5 REFERENCES

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2.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1. Your answer should highlight the following points:

- Good Character
- Clam disposition
- Sound mind
- Truthfulness discipline, courage

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1. Your answer should highlight the following points:

- Plato denied participation of average person in politics
- Plato confused unity with harmony

UNIT 3 PLATO: JUSTICE*

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Perspectives on Justice before Plato
 - 3.2.1 Traditional View
 - 3.2.2 Radical View
 - 3.2.3 Pragmatic View
- 3.3 Plato's Concept of Justice
 - 3.3.1 Three Classes and Three Souls
 - 3.3.2 Communist Principles
 - 3.3.2.1 Communism of Plato and Marx: A Comparison
 - 3.3.3 Justice at Individual and State Level
 - 3.3.4 Critical Assessment
- 3.4 Plato and Indian Political Thinkers
 - 3.4.1 Plato and Kautilya
 - 3.4.2 Socrates, Plato and Gandhi
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 References
- 3.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit deals with Plato's concept of justice, one of the earliest works on this issue. After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Know views on justice prior to Plato
- Describe Plato's concept of justice
- Analyze some of the limitations of Plato's concept of justice

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Plato was born in an aristocratic family in Athens. His real name was Aristocles meaning the best and renowned. He was given the name Plato by his wrestling coach due to his broad and strong shoulders. He was the most famous student of Socrates and was the teacher of another Greek stalwart, Aristotle. Apart from Socrates, Plato was also influenced by Greek philosophers Parmenides, also called 'Father of Metaphysics', Heraclitus and Pythagoras. Plato's major works

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include the *Republic*, the *Statesman* and the *Laws*. Plato is widely seen as the founder of philosophical idealism as he believed that there is a universal idea that lies beyond what senses can experience. Plato's life spanned the ruinous period of Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta from 431 to 404 B.C. resulting in the defeat of Athens. It was probably the impact of instability and disorder experienced during the period of Peloponnesian war that Plato's theory of justice was based on the premise of harmony.

Political philosophers from Plato and Aristotle to John Rawls have seen justice as the main guiding principle to regulate power. Justice plays a main part in maintaining, shaping and improving political order. Plato's main work, the *Republic* is a book about justice. In Greek, republic means justice, unlike its Latin meaning, state or polity. The book seeks to answer the question – what is justice and whether it is a desirable virtue for people and states. Since it deals with an ideal concept, the book has been often called a utopian work of philosophy. Plato constructed *Republic* in form of a dialogue between Socrates and his friends on the virtue of justice. Socrates was the first one to develop the dialectical method (in the form of a dialogue) to establish truth. It was called *elenchus* in Greek, meaning refutation or putting to rest. Socrates would initiate a conversation with anyone and discuss meaning of beauty, justice or truth. He would ask the individual about his definition of something and through cross-examination, would make him realise some inconsistency in his definition to take forward the conversation. This method was so important to Socrates that he refused to write down his thoughts as he believed that the responsive interaction between the teacher and his students was the real essence of philosophizing.

3.2 PERSPECTIVES ON JUSTICE BEFORE PLATO

Pythagoras, ancient Greek philosopher and one who influenced Plato, had expressed his views about the concept of justice before Plato. Pythagoras believed in the power of numbers and said that justice is the equal multiple of itself, i.e. it is a square number. A square number represents harmony since it is made up of equal parts. Hence, he equated justice with equality. A state should preserve equality in order to remain just. The Pythagorean School was famous for giving centrality to ethics and ethical regulation of life. Ethics and harmony play an important part in Plato's conception of justice. Through a dialogue between Socrates and others, Plato has examined some perspectives on justice before expressing his own views on the subject.

3.2.1 Traditional View

In the *Republic*, traditional views about justice are expressed by the father son duo of Cephalus and Polemarchus. When Socrates asked Cephalus about his views on justice, he said that justice consisted in speaking the truth, being honest and paying back one's debt. Socrates, however, pointed towards some inconsistencies in his definition. If a friend who lent his weapon to us goes mad, it would not be justice if we return the weapon back to him. He also pointed out that in some cases, being honest and speaking the truth may do more harm than

good and it is better to conceal truth in such cases. When Cephalus gave up his argument, his son, Polemarchus carried it forward by saying that justice was giving each man his due, meaning harming your enemies and helping your friends. Socrates again points to the shortcomings of this definition. He says that helping friends may involve immoral acts like stealing or telling a lie. One may also misjudge his friends and enemies and the rule of doing good to friends and harm to enemies may not apply. Hurting someone makes the doer less just or less excellent while justice is about excellence.

3.2.2 Radical View

The radical perspective on justice was given by Thrasymachus, a Sophist and a renowned teacher of rhetoric. Sophism was a rival school of Socratic tradition which stood for democracy, individualism and social change. Thrasymachus defined justice as the interest of the stronger party, what could also be called as might is right. Similar sentiment was expressed by Thucydides, Greek historian and general who is regarded as the forefather of political realism in international relations. Socrates answered by saying that even the powerful make mistakes and end up making laws which harm themselves. This violates the principle that the exercise of power by the powerful is to serve their self-interest. He goes on to say that the proper objective of a physician is to treat his patients just like it is in the interest of the shoemaker to make fine shoes for his customers. Likewise, the real interest of the statesman lies in well-being of his subjects.

3.2.3 Pragmatic View

This view was supported by Glaucon and Adeimantus, brothers of Plato. They considered justice a child of fear and the necessity of the weaker. Much on the lines of social contract theorists like Hobbes, they believed that to come out of the state of nature (in which there is rampant injustice), people make an agreement not to do injustice to anyone and also, not to be a victim of injustice from anyone. Hence, people agree to behave in a just manner under the force of law. However, Socrates argued that justice is not an artificial virtue that could emanate from a contract. In contrast, justice is an innate quality of soul and conscience. Justice exists independently by itself and it does not require any external recognition.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
 ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. What was the response of Socrates to Polemarchus’s view on justice?

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3.3 PLATO’S CONCEPT OF JUSTICE

After examining the prevailing conceptions of justice, Plato gives his theory of justice. Justice was one of the four cardinal Greek virtues – other three being wisdom or prudence, courage or fortitude, temperance or self-control. Greek philosophers defined justice as virtue in action. They always conceptualised justice in terms of harmony and order, whether they used it for an individual, state or the universe. Greeks before Socrates used to describe the cosmos, which means order as just. The idea of harmony and order is clearly visible in the contemporary usage of justice as fairness. In Greek language, the word for justice is ‘Dikaiosyne’ which means righteousness or just. Plato’s justice was based on morality and ethics, not on legal basis. It was reflected in doing one’s duty and contributing to the society as per an individual’s capabilities.

Plato believed in the Socratic dictum that virtue is knowledge and knowledge can eradicate political ills and injustice. For Plato, the ideal state possessed the four cardinal virtues. Wisdom would prevail due to knowledgeable rulers while courage would be present through brave warriors. There would be self-control due to the harmony in society following a common understanding pertaining to who would be the ruler and lastly, justice would prevail as everyone would do their duty for which they are best suited and not interfere in other people’s work. Plato saw the state as an ideal while justice was its reality. Sabine says that the theory of state in the *Republic* results in the conception of justice. He also said that justice for Plato is a bond that holds the society together. Plato’s idea of justice came from his vision of the political community and justice serves common interest. Even a den of thieves would need principles of justice to survive. Every state needs principles of justice as its foundation. The individuals in a state should be convinced that their state is a just state and they must follow the principles of justice of their state. Justice is the greatest good that people can attain as individuals and as members of a larger political community.

3.3.1 Three Classes and Three Souls

Plato starts his discussion on justice in a state by saying that the state is natural as no one is self-sufficient and human beings require each other for survival. Plato says that self-sufficiency consists in maintaining division of labour in a state. A successful political community has to perform three functions – production, protection (defence) and statesmanship (ruling). Hence, justice would consist in fulfilling these three activities based on functional specialisation. It would ensure that justice prevails as not only the common interest would be served but individual happiness and well-being is also served since there is harmony in what individuals do, what they get and their individual psyches. Based on functional specialisation, Plato gives three types of classes in a state (also called the three classes and three souls, an idea Plato borrowed from Pythagoras).

- **Rulers:** Every state would need rulers to rule with a function of making policy decisions.
- **Auxiliaries:** This is the class of warriors with a military function and they are part of the guardians.
- **Artisans:** This class has to perform economic function and includes all those who produce goods and perform socially necessary services, for ex. traders, farmers etc.

Each class exhibits certain virtues. The ruling class must have the virtue of wisdom and must have knowledge of properly ruling the state as a whole. Since the auxiliary class has to defend the state, they should possess the virtue of courage. The artisans must show temperance or self-control to curb their passions. They should understand that they have to perform an economic function in the state and possession of wealth or status should not prompt them to take over other functions like rulership; which they are not equipped to handle.

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

Figure 1 - Plato's Three Classes and Their Virtues

The division of labour is also a division of virtue in Plato's ideal state. Those who have a superior role in division of labour also have superior degree of virtue. Since the rulers have knowledge or wisdom due to the rigorous education process, they have complete virtue while the other two classes have incomplete virtue. They have knowledge of ideas like justice, beauty, courage and truth and other moral attributes which Plato called *Forms*. According to Plato, each entity that exists in our world is an imperfect copy of the Form of that thing that exists in a transcendental realm. Only the rulers with wisdom can see these Forms and only they can ensure justice matches its Form as much as possible. For Plato, education was a necessary tool for moral reform to transform human soul. It would facilitate performance of one's social functions and in attaining fulfilment. Rousseau regarded Plato's *Republic* as the finest treatise ever written on education. Plato's system of education combined best elements from Athens and Sparta's education models. From Athens, he picked up creativity, excellence and individual training while from Sparta; Plato drew the feature of civic training. Details of Plato's education system are given in the next unit.

Plato's conception of justice could be called distributive as it stood for giving his due to an individual like skills and training while in return, the individual would perform his duty with responsibility. To substantiate his argument about

differences in individual capabilities, Plato used a ‘noble lie’ through the myth of the metals which would be uttered by the rulers. The myth would propagate that as children of earth, all were born with some metallic component in their bodies. The rulers were born with components of gold in their bodies, auxiliaries with silver while the artisans had parts of brass in their bodies. This noble lie served two purposes. All people would believe that they were part of a bigger family with other members being their brothers. Secondly, all would accept their station in life as naturally suited to qualities they were born with and hence, would sustain functional specialisation. There was an elaborate system to select rulers in Plato’s state and any child, irrespective of sex and class could be a ruler if he or she exhibited capabilities to learn philosophical truths. Plato stood for a society based on merit not birth. He did not believe that talent and skill could be passed on from one generation to the other.

3.3.2 Communist Principles

Plato wanted to remove objects of desire from the ruling class. He argued that it was easy for an individual to go against the common interest for the sake of his family. Hence, Plato abolished private property and family for the rulers as it encouraged nepotism, favouritism, factionalism and other corrupt practices. Plato wanted the rulers to promote common good, not their personal interests. He proposed that the rulers would live together in common, like soldiers in a barrack. Their basic needs for simple food and clothing had to be met by the artisans. Mating would be regulated to ensure a future pool of rulers, but it would take place outside any family structure. Children would be held in common and they would not know their real parents and would identify the state as their family. There would be nurseries maintained by state to take care of the children. Plato’s communism applies to the ruling elite and not the majority of population.

3.3.2.1 Communism of Plato and Marx: A Comparison

There is a big time gap between Plato and Marx and stark differences in socio-economic and political environment in which they gave their ideas on communism. Plato advocated an ascetic communism to remove objects of desire from the ruling class, not meant to distribute them more equitably. It was also called *koinonia*, meaning fellowship or communion in Greek. There are a number of differences between the two. Ernest Barker called Plato’s communism as aristocratic and half communism, as it applied only to the ruling class while Marx’s communism was universal in nature. Plato’s communism was applicable to property and family while that of Marx was concerned with means of production. Communism was introduced by Marx as a weapon to destroy class distinctions and create a classless and stateless society. On the other hand, Plato introduced communism to maintain class hierarchy to maintain harmony in the state.

3.3.3 Justice at Individual and State Level

Plato argued that in a just individual, the philosophic element (wisdom) rules his soul. An individual’s soul should be in harmony and his reason, spirit and

appetite should be in right relationship with each other so that he does not cross his boundaries. A just individual does his own job and does not interfere in matters of others. He would take only his share and would not claim that of the other. Socrates said that justice consists in minding your own business and not interfering with other people. In an unjust person, the division of labour in the soul or psyche has broken down and his passions and desires begin to rule his soul than reason. At the state level, justice would exist when each class maintains its appropriate position in society and ensures harmony between different virtues in a state. Plato, however, left one aspect unsolved. He insisted that the artisans would willingly subordinate themselves to the ruling class, but he was uncertain as to how long this subordination would last. He has even recommended the use of force and rhetorical persuasion leading to control and monitoring. This raised concerns whether the ideal state would be a happy one as well. Towards the end of the *Republic*, Plato has highlighted the contrast between misery of an unjust life and happiness of just life. He has discussed the decline of the ideal state arguing that the state would disintegrate as it is a human institution which is an imperfect representation of an ultimate reality. Change is in the nature of this sensory world and the ideal state is no exception. The downfall of the state begins with the ruling class which gets corrupted by attraction of property and desire starts to rule wisdom and reason. They would enslave the citizens and the new virtue would be courage. Honour would be held above knowledge and this new type of regime would be called Timocracy, a state ruled by the auxiliaries. Timocracy would give way to oligarchy or the rule of a few rich and oligarchy would make way for democracy, rule by many. Plato emphasised that human beings are a product of their social environment and they will be corrupted if the social order is corrupted.

3.3.4 Critical Assessment

Plato's concept of justice has been criticised on a number of fronts.

First, Plato's idea may seem liberating but it implied excessive regimentation with less respect for privacy and individuality. To ensure that family life is not spoiled by ill effects like selfishness, Plato abolished emotional bonding that a family provides to an individual. Order and harmony have been more important to Plato than emotion and passion. The state is controlled by the wise as the soul is controlled by reason, but this control is so absolute that it approaches tyranny. The boundaries between liberation and repression seem blurred in Plato's ideas.

Second, there is a major inconsistency in Plato's proposal to maintain division of labour in the state. Despite having elaborate arrangements for classifying people in different classes and extensive education for the rulers, Plato is still concerned that the rulers may be corrupted and could rule unwisely. That is why, Plato instituted the system of communism for rulers to purge their desires. But the critical problem is this – if virtue is knowledge, how can the rulers be tempted to act unjustly? Socrates had insisted it cannot happen, but Plato has doubted the very Socratic premise he set out to prove.

Third, Plato’s political theory is tainted by elitism as political decision making in his ideal state was in the hands of a few philosophical rulers who would be oriented towards the common good. However, Plato was so strongly an elitist that he believed that the vast majority of human beings had no reason to decide important things for themselves. He even considered them to be incapable of judging the decision taken by their rulers. It can be argued that by classifying human beings on the basis of reason, Plato attacked democratic institutions of Athens. Karl Popper criticised Plato for using the theory of unchecked sovereignty of the ruling class to undermine the idea of an accountable government. Popper and other critics have pointed out that Plato’s notion of dictatorship, the “noble lie,” eugenics, and censorship resemble the modern totalitarian ideologies of Nazism and Stalinism.

Fourth, Plato’s idea of citizenship was not participatory but as obedience to the authority. The individual existed for the society and state and hence, was a means to an end, not an end in himself. Plato’s state was very powerful and it gave more importance to unity than diversity. Aristotle had also criticized Plato’s idea of unity. A state should not seek a strict singleness as proposed in the *Republic*, but should be realized in harmony of diverse elements.

Fifth, Plato’s justice is based on ethical and moral principles and hence, is not enforceable. It gives utmost importance to self-control in the interest of society which makes it vulnerable to violation by different individuals.

Lastly, German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche criticised Plato for founding a just and rightly ordered society with the help of a lie (myth of metals). The reasons for social ordering never became clear in Plato’s arguments. The noble lie is contrary to Plato’s assertion that justice is identical to knowledge or truth while a lie represents injustice. Plato tried to hold his ideal state together with a lie or with an act of injustice. It indicated that even Plato recognised the limited capacity of truth to reform politics.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. Why did Plato resort to the noble lie?

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2. Discuss the features of Plato’s Communism.

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3.4 PLATO AND INDIAN POLITICAL THINKERS

3.4.1 Plato and Kautilya

There are constant comparisons between Oriental and Occidental thinkers. Western (Occidental) thinkers like Plato can be compared to the towering figure in ancient Indian political thought, Kautilya. Kautilya is believed to have been born around the time when Plato died, making him an almost contemporary of Plato. There are certain similarities between Plato and Kautilya.

- Both the thinkers thought that the state should be ruled by the learned and elites, an idea which goes against the spirit of democracy.
- They also share their contempt towards the common man. Plato said that common man is nothing but a bundle of appetites, while Kautilya said that common man is inconsistent and unsteady.
- Hierarchy and functional specialization was important to their concept of social structure. Plato gave the concept of three classes and favored slavery while in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, caste system has been maintained. Plato never discussed slavery formally and his views need to be extracted from some remarks made by him in his works, *the Republic* and *the Laws*.
- Kautilya advocated conquest of senses (*indriyajayah*) which is similar to Plato's concept of virtue which favors conquest of self or the inner enemy.
- Both prefer their king to be from the military class. Plato's ruler is *kshatriya swami* of Kautilya.

There were some differences as well between the two ancient stalwarts. Plato favoured the aristocrats to do two functions, to rule and do intellectual activity. On the other hand, Kautilya wanted Brahmins to do intellectual activity while the rule would be done by the *kshatriya* king. Plato was a philosopher while Kautilya was a seasoned politician apart from being a philosopher. Kautilya has made substantial contribution to the field of diplomacy and foreign policy while these aspects did not find much mention in Plato's works.

3.4.2 Socrates, Plato and Gandhi

M K Gandhi was influenced by Socrates and started to identify with him during his stay in South Africa. Gandhi translated Plato's *Apology* in 1908 from English to Gujarati. This book is about how Socrates defended himself when he was put on trial in Athens in 399 B.C. Gandhi was attracted by self-sacrifice, sense of

duty and moral conviction of Socrates. Since both, Plato and Gandhi were deeply influenced by Socrates; it is not surprising that both of them were idealists in their ideas. For them, politics and ethics should not be separated, while they also give more importance to duties than rights.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. Highlight similarities between Plato and Kautilya.

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2. Which qualities of Socrates influenced Gandhi?

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3.5 LET US SUM UP

The study of Western philosophical tradition begins with Plato's masterpiece, the *Republic*. Greek philosophers including Plato conceptualised justice in terms of harmony and order, whether they used it for an individual, state or the universe. Plato's idea of justice came from his vision of the political community and justice serves common interest. A successful political community has to perform three functions – production, protection (defence) and statesmanship (ruling). These functions were to be performed by three classes respectively – artisans, auxiliaries and the rulers. Hence, justice would consist in fulfilling these three activities based on functional specialisation. Plato's society was highly hierarchical, structured, merit oriented and regimented where individuals were trained to perform their allotted duties. The rulers were to be purged of any desires and could not have private property and family under the communist principles. Plato's communism was ascetic in nature, similar to the life found in Buddhist monasteries. Somebody like Gandhi too would have demanded similar way of life from the political leaders. Plato's theory of justice may have its share of limitations, but it was meant to achieve the welfare and development of

community and establish social harmony. It stood for non-identity of rights and power.

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3.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1) Your answer should highlight the following points:

- Socrates said helping friends may involve immoral acts like stealing or telling a lie
- One may also misjudge his friends and enemies
- Hurting someone makes the doer less just or less excellent while justice is about excellence.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1. Your answer should highlight the following points:

- All people would believe they were part of a bigger family with other members being their brothers
- All would accept their station in life as naturally suited to qualities they were born with and hence, would sustain functional specialization

2. Your answer should highlight the following points:

- Communist principles applicable to the ruling class only
- No private property or family for the rulers
- Rulers would live together in common, like soldiers in a barrack

- Regulated mating to ensure a pool of future rulers
- Children to be held in common; would not know their real parents and would identify the state as their family

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

1. Your answer should highlight the following points:

- Both believed the state should be ruled by the learned and elites
- Shared contempt towards common man
- Hierarchy and functional specialization was important to their concept of social structure
- Both emphasized conquest of senses and self-control
- Both prefer the king to be from the military class

2. Your answer should highlight the following points:

- Self-sacrifice
- Sense of duty
- Moral conviction



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UNIT 4 PLATO: EDUCATION (PRESENTATION THEMES: CRITIQUE OF DEMOCRACY, WOMEN AND GUARDIANSHIP, EDUCATION, CENSORSHIP)*

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Theory of Education
 - 4.2.1 System of Education
 - 4.2.1.1 Elementary Education
 - 4.2.1.2 Higher Education
- 4.3 Thoughts on Women
 - 4.3.1 Criticism
- 4.4 Critique of Democracy
- 4.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.6 References
- 4.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will be reading about the concept of Education as described by Plato. The Unit also presents an introduction to his idea on Women, Guardianship as well as a critique of democracy. After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the idea of education
- Enumerate on Women and Guardianship and
- Discuss the criticism related to democracy as explained by Plato.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Plato (c.428-347 B.C.) is one of the most important figures of the Ancient Greek world and the history of Western thought. Political philosophy in the West begins with the ancient Greeks and Plato. Plato was one of the most influential thinkers in the history of western philosophy. In his written dialogues he expanded on the ideas and techniques of his teacher Socrates. In Plato's ideal state there are three major classes, corresponding to the three parts of the soul. The guardians, who are philosophers, govern the city; the auxiliaries are soldiers who defend it; and the lowest class comprises the producers (farmers, artisans, etc). Plato's society

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was highly structured, hierarchical and meritocratic in nature where everyone was expected to perform the duties that were allotted to them. He ruled out wealth, gender and birth as criteria for distributing privileges and favours. Education structure was crafted in a way so as to let every individual reach his potential through extensive training. The science of eugenics was to be conducted with utmost secrecy, as only the philosopher ruler was to know and careful selection of mates would ensure that the genetics endowment was carried on to the children. In the following sections, Plato's ideas related to education of these classes, his thoughts on women and his critique of democracy are discussed in detail.

4.2 THEORY OF EDUCATION

According to Plato, education is a matter of conversion, i.e. a complete turn-around from the world of appearances to the world of reality. 'The conversion of the souls', says Plato, 'is not to put the power of sight in the soul's eye, which already has it, but to insure that, instead of looking in the wrong direction, it is turned the way it ought to be'. As everyone possesses the power to learn in his soul, what is needed is to turn our soul in a proper way that is to prepare a good environment for learning. It is shown that the more you move up, the more you acquire knowledge. The whole process of learning requires teachers and students; teachers are the ones who know the subject matter to be taught. The process of learning was suggested to be in the form of discussion between students and teachers. Plato's idea of education was primarily intended for those who were to be statesmen. What made him to emphasise the statesmen more was to avoid incapable leaders; because these statesmen will be given a state, and if they are not educated, they could lead the country or the state into a terrible situation. The whole range of the educational system would be in part physical, in part intellectual, and in part moral. If a man cannot withstand moral temptation, then he might sacrifice the interest of the society in order to satisfy his own interests.

The objective of education is to turn the soul towards light. Plato stated that the main function of education is not to put knowledge into the soul, but to bring out the latent talents in the soul by directing it towards the right objects. This explanation of Plato on education highlights his object of education and guides the readers in proper direction to unfold the ramifications of his theory of education. In *Laws* he says: "Education is the first and the fairest thing that the best of men can ever have". According to Plato the aim of education is the welfare of both the safety of the society and the food of individual. He was of the opinion that education should develop the sense of ideas in people, who possesses the ability and purpose to perform their assigned tasks. Thus, the aim of education is to enable a person to acquire the knowledge of the absolute good. Education, according to Plato, is the welfare of both the individual and the society. His guiding principle is that, "Nothing must be admitted in education which does not conduce to the promotion of virtue". According to V.K. Maheshwari, Plato's treatment of education in the *Laws* is different from that in the *Republic*. Education in the *Laws* is to be universal and not restricted, as in the

Republic, to the guardian class and is to be compulsory. Children should come to the school not only if their parents please, but there should be compulsory education. The highest goal of education, Plato believed, is the knowledge of Good and to nurture a man to become a better human being. Education prepares a man for the vision of absolute reality and that is why, education right from the beginning is a preparation for the future.

4.2.1 System of Education

Plato believed that the young minds could be shaped easily, if they are directed properly. He stressed the tremendous receptive potential of human mind which is why, according to him, early education played a crucial role in the overall development of the individual. At this point, the educator might try and train the individual to restrain desires, for control and harnessing of non-rational aspects of the soul was an important prerequisite for the full development of the rational. For Plato, elementary education helped to attain the first goal, while higher education ensured the development of rationality.

4.2.1.1 Primary Education

For Plato, the primary education was till the age of eighteen and would be confined to the guardian class, followed by two years of compulsory military training and then followed by higher education for those who qualified. While the primary education made the soul responsive to the environment, higher education helped the soul to search for truth which illuminated it. Plato believed that education began from the age of seven and before this, children should stay with their mothers for moral education and genders should be allowed to play with each other. Plato was of the opinion that for the first 10 years, there should be predominantly physical education. In other words, every school must have a gymnasium and a playground in order to develop the physique and health of children and make them resistant to any disease. Apart from this physical education, Plato also recommended music to bring about certain refinement in their character and lend grace and health to the soul and the body. Plato also prescribed subjects such as mathematics, history and science. The content of education comprised of gymnastics, literature, music and elementary mathematics. Gymnastics is essential for the physical and mental growth. Music is chosen as the medium of education, an avenue for the spiritual growth, and ideas are the contents of education for this stage. After the age of six years, both girls and boys should be separated and boys should play with boys and girls with girls and they both should be taught the use of different arms.

Plato recommended censorship of literature and music to encourage the virtues necessary in the guardian class, for making reason supreme. Censorship of poetry, stories and tales was undertaken to ensure that the impressionable young minds were not exposed to harmful ideas. Plato was particularly insistent that children not fear death; otherwise they would not develop the courage needed on the battlefield. Children were exposed to stories about gods and great personalities to ensure their good moral upbringing. Plato's idea was to shut off

all vices from the lives of the children. Training in the right virtues would create the perfect members of the guardian class. Education in these subjects was followed by two years of compulsory military training. The guardians were perfected as warriors. Luxury and self-indulgence was prohibited with the purpose of strengthening the spirit. Plato reiterated the Athenian practice which provided for compulsory military service between the age of seventeen and twenty. Elementary education perfected those souls which were receptive to habit and conditioning.

4.2.1.2 Higher Education

According to Plato, at the age of 20, the child must take an examination that would determine whether or not to pursue higher education. Those who failed in the examination were asked to take up activities in the community such as businessmen, clerks, workers, farmers and the like. These selections were in accordance with the age and stage to which these students were admitted. Plato emphasised that education must start early. The first course in the scheme would last ten years from the age group of twenty five to thirty years, and in this age they get the training of Mathematical calculation and last for another ten years, after the completion the selected ones are admitted in the study of dialect. Here students undergo mathematical training preparatory to dialectic. Plato has highlighted the qualities needed for an individual to enter higher education. He proclaimed that preference should be given to the surest, bravest, fairest and those who have the natural gifts to facilitate their education. From the age thirty to thirty five, Plato restricted the study of dialectic to this age because he felt that an individual should be mature enough to carry on the study in dialectics, especially about ultimate principles of reality. In the next stage, from thirty five to fifty years, according to Plato, an individual is ready as a philosopher or ruler, to return to practical life to take command in war and hold such offices of state as befits him. After reaching 50, one should spend the life in contemplation of “the Good” as their chief pursuit should be philosophy and should participate in politics, and rule for the good of the people as a matter of their duty.

The Platonic approach to education comprises the following aspects: sciences and arts, which were to be communicated by teachers to their pupils; moral virtue, necessary for teachers and students, and finally political institutions, which were connected with the learning process. The true goal of education for both Plato and Aristotle was to inculcate the values of civic virtues. They framed an educational curriculum that would impart “a moral liberal education rather than a study of political science. What they sought was rather a frame of mind which will respond in a just, responsible and self restrained manner to public issues”. Both believed that education by injecting into the citizens a sense of rights and obligations would be an effective remedy for corruption and instability that affected the states of their times. They were convinced that a system of education controlled and regulated by the state would teach the citizens the traditions and laws of the state.

4.3 THOUGHTS ON WOMEN

In *Republic*, Plato, through dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon, suggests that the guardian women should perform the same job as the male guardians. Some may follow convention and object that women should be given different jobs because they differ from men by nature. However, for Plato, the natural differences between men and women are not relevant when it comes to the jobs of protecting and ruling the city. Both sexes are naturally suited for these tasks. He goes on to argue that the measure of allowing the women to perform the same tasks as the men in this way is not only feasible but also best. This is the case since the most suited people for the job will be performing it.

He also goes on to propose that there should be no separate families among the members of the guardian class: the guardians will possess all the women and children in common. Plato abolished the idea of private family and property for the guardian class, for it encouraged nepotism, favouritism, factionalism and other corrupt practices among the rulers. For Plato, politics did not mean promoting one's personal interests; instead, it was to promote the common good. Plato proposed that the members of the guardian class live together in common, like soldiers in barracks. The Platonic scheme was based on the idea that women and men were identical in natural endowment and faculties. There were two ideas that were embedded in Plato's communism of wives: reform of conventional marriage, and emancipation of women. To achieve this, Plato proposed abolition of permanent monogamous marriages and private families. These were restricted to guardian women alone. Firstly, for Plato, conventional marriage led to the women's subordination, subjugation and seclusion. He rejected the idea of marriage as a spiritual union based on love and mutual respect. However, marriage was necessary to ensure reproduction and continuation of human race. He, therefore, advocated temporary sexual unions solely for the purpose of bearing children. Plato further stipulated the age for both men and women for begetting children. He stated that the proper age for begetting children women should be between the age of 20 and 40 and men between 25 and 55 because at this time, the physical and intellectual vigour is more. Plato advocated that the best guardian men will also be allowed to have sexual intercourse with best guardian women for the purpose of giving birth to children with similar natures. The philosopher ruler would decide on these sexual unions. Once born, the children will be taken away to a rearing pen to be taken care of by nurses and the parents will not be allowed to know who their own children are. Except for the philosopher ruler, none would have the knowledge of the true parentage of the children.

Secondly, Plato pushes for women's emancipation from patriarchal family on the ground of their equality with men in all aspects, if given the same conditions of upbringing up, education and opportunities. Therefore, confining women into domestic chores was wasting half of the potential social talent. He states that - "So far then in regulating the positions of women, we may claim to have come safely through one hazardous proposition that male and female guardians shall

have all occupations in common. The consistency of the argument is an assurance that the plan is good and also feasible.” And henceforth, he moves to argue the indispensable need to abolish the institution of family itself for the ruling classes. Plato argues the abolition of family on the basis that the family is linked with property and is equally distractive and corrupting as property. The rulers must not waste time and energy in familial responsibility, but devote themselves in the invention of the truth, i.e. in the comprehension of the Idea of Good.

Among Plato’s reasons for offering his idea of communism of wives and property were these: that 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. He, however, permitted the third social class to enjoy private family and property, but under strict supervision of the guardians. He subordinated both the guardians and artisans to a moral ideal: welfare of the state. While guardians were entrusted with the task of ruling and governance, they would lead strict and austere lives. The artisans did not have any say or right to participate in the political processes, but enjoyed emotional ties and had possessions unlike the guardians. Plato, for his part, played fair with both the sections of the society in terms of rewards and denials. The characteristics of his ideal state included class, communism, civility, control, contentment and consensus.

4.3.1 Criticism

Through the communism of wives, Plato challenges that very notion and conventions of human society. While for Plato, his scheme might appear to be liberating, it rather implies excessive restriction and regimentation of the society with no space for privacy and individuality. Aristotle also disagreed with this idea by emphasising that family and private property were important for the happiness of the individual and welfare of the state. Aristotle looked to the family as a natural institution and questioned Plato’s wisdom in abolishing it. Popper called Plato anti-individualist and anti-social change. He said that Plato’s denial of owning property by the guardian class and then, the denial of family and children are against the interest of the individuals. For Popper, in Plato’s Ideal State, individuals are like commodities or tools or instruments of state, which are always under the command of the one who controls the State. Plato wanted to maintain his *Ideal State* as it was originally instituted. He did not like to make any changes to his *Ideal State*. His views on communism of wives and property, the way he advocated on *eugenics*, his scheme of education all reflected his hesitation towards social change.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. Discuss Plato’s ideas on Women.

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4.4 CRITIQUE OF DEMOCRACY

Plato viewed democracy as a step in the inevitable descent into tyranny for societies undergoing political decay. Plato explains that democracies are susceptible to “tyranny of the majority” and rule by demagoguery. To understand Plato’s critique of democracy, it is important to outline his analogy between the soul and the city. He introduces this in *Book II* of the *Republic* where he says that “...let us first inquire into the nature of justice and injustice in the city...” The most just form of governance, the aristocracy, is joined with the philosopher-king who has the necessary qualities to rule a just society.

Plato describes four kinds of societies: First, a timocratic society, where the courageous soldiers have usurped for themselves the privilege of making decisions that properly belongs only to its better-educated rulers. A timocratic person is, therefore, someone who is more concerned with defending personal honour than with wisely choosing what is truly best. Second, an oligarchic government in which both classes of guardian have been pressed into the service of a ruling group comprising few powerful and wealthy citizens. By analogy, an oligarchic society is one where every thought and action is devoted to the self-indulgent goal of amassing greater wealth. Third, a democratic government where promises of equality for all of its citizens are made but it delivers only anarchy. In democracy, members are interested in the pursuit of private interests. Fourth, the tyrannical society where a single individual has gained control, restoring order in place of anarchy, but serving only personal welfare instead of the interests of the whole city. For Plato, a society organised in the ideally efficient way is said to have an aristocratic government. Similarly, an aristocratic person is one who’s rational, spirit, and appetitive souls work together properly. Such governments and people are the most genuine examples of true justice at the social and personal levels.

According to Plato, aristocracy inevitably gives way to a lesser form of governance due to the fallibility of human nature. One faction is “Iron and bronze,” who are drawn to the accumulation of wealth. The other is “Gold and silver,” who try in vain to bring the “opposition back to virtue and the inherited order.” The factionalism represents a move to timocracy, a compromise between aristocracy and oligarchy. The greatest good, which was wisdom under aristocratic rule, has now become the pursuit of wealth under the guise of the oligarchic soul. Oligarchy then transitions to democracy, as the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few sows discontent in an expanding underclass of citizenry. Plato describes democracy’s inception as “either by force of arms or by

the use of terror which compels the opposition to withdraw.” The subsequent paramount freedoms that democracy upholds serve to damage the city, as the “permissiveness” of the democratic city enables the manifestation of tyranny. Plato sees democracy as more dangerous than oligarchy because although the two share the same damaging characteristics, the democratic city “has embraced anarchy,” and the class of people that motivates the poor against the wealthy rulers, is dominant. Finally, the descent into tyranny is marked by the entrance of the aforementioned demagogue, who benefits from democracy’s “propensity to elevate and glorify one man as the people’s protector and champion.” Plato’s critique of democracy is that democracy does not place a premium on wisdom and knowledge seeking as an inherent good. Instead, democracy suffers from the failures as it prioritizes wealth and property accumulation as the highest good. For Plato what is worse is that democracy embraces total freedom (which Plato calls “anarchy”) and unnecessary “appetites,” which crowd out the ruler’s responsibilities of virtuous governance, to control the democratic soul.

This was a common chain of political perspective that is found in Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. All three spoke about defending the values, way of life and attitudes of an aristocracy that was on a decline. This was so because Plato wrote at a time when Athens was at a crossroads after defeat in the Peloponnesian War. Although the defeat was largely due to the military strategy of Athens, Plato castigated the Athenian democracy for the failure. For Plato, revitalisation and reformation of the aristocracy was crucial so that it could once again become the basis of civic life. This was seen as the best way to counter the sweep of democratic revolution that was led by traders, artisans and merchants along with the rising materialism and individualism that was engulfing the Athenian society. Plato equated democratisation with moral corruption and degradation and endeavoured to reform and revolutionise the general quality of human life. The Republic was a kind of rebuttal to what Plato viewed as Athenian way of life and its participatory democracy. He dismissed the participation of Greek male adults in political processes and forming of political opinion as unnecessary and amateurish. For him, democracy was nothing but incompetence of the politicians which had given rise to factionalism, violence, and partisan politics leading to political instability. For Plato, democracy did not value highly gifted persons.

Plato has been criticised for his comments on democracy. For example, Isaiah Berlin pointed out that Plato does not grant individual the freedom of choice and rejects pluralism or acceptance of different value systems and lifestyles within a society. Popper, for his part, characterised Plato as anti-individual, anti-humanist and anti-democratic having the aim of arresting all social development and change. This was achieved by establishing a society that was regimented, hierarchical, and unequal, where the value of an individual was based on his contribution to the social whole. It was the interest of the ruling elite that mattered in the Platonic ideal state. For Popper, this was reinforced with the help of censorship, ban on innovation in education, legislation, and propaganda. Politically this state exercised total control and economically, it was autarchy.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. Describe four types of societies discussed by Plato.

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4.5 LET US SUM UP

Plato grew up during the Peloponnesian war which began before he was born and lasted until he was 23 years old. The demoralization of Athens due to defeat during the war led to an oligarchy revolution, followed by a savage tyranny that finally gave way to the re-establishment of a democratic constitution. His thoughts on democracy are well explained in *The Republic* and in Plato we find the fiercest critic of democracy which he viewed as a step in the inevitable descent into tyranny for societies undergoing political decay. Plato equated democratisation with moral corruption and degradation and endeavoured to reform and revolutionise the general quality of human life. The Republic was a kind of rebuttal to what Plato viewed as Athenian way of life and its participatory democracy.

One of the key tenets of his philosophy is his theory of education. It is not a surprise that Plato founded The Academy in 387 BC, the first institution of higher learning in Greece. It became the intellectual centre in Greece and the equivalent of the first university in the history of Europe. In *The Republic*, Plato sets up a theory of what education means for both the individual and the state, focusing on the important role of those who must carefully choose the material to teach the future guardians of the state. Plato's curriculum was carefully planned to include training for the spirit (music) and training for the body (gymnastics), with more difficult academic subjects added when the child is developmentally ready. What is visible in his structure of imparting education is that Plato supported a type of vocational education, education to complete one's role in life; education for the producers, the guardians and the philosopher kings, enough education to do one's job well, but each grouped according to one's abilities. Plato insisted on the great importance of the role of education, to bring the young to gradually behold eternal and absolute truths and values; to be saved from passing their lives in the shadow world of error, falsehood, prejudice and blindness to true values.

Another very critical evaluation was that Plato saw equality in men and women in their personhood. He was one of the first to propose equal education for men and women based on their ability to learn, not on their gender. He viewed the suppression of women as a waste of human resources which denied society access to the best possible guardians. In *The Republic*, Plato explains two ways for the social organisation of the ideal state, the first that the function of guardianship is to be performed by men and women alike, the second that for the guardians the private household and therefore, the institution of marriage is to be abolished, since the guardians do not own property and the care of children is to be a communal responsibility. Plato believed that the interests of the state are best preserved if children are raised and educated by the society as a whole, rather than by their biological parents. So he proposed a scheme for the bearing, nurturing, and training of children in the guardian class. The presumed pleasures of family life, Plato held, are among the benefits that the higher classes of a society must be prepared to forego.

4.6 REFERENCES

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4.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1. Your answer should highlight the following points:
 - Conventional marriage led to women's subjugation
 - Pushes for women's emancipation from patriarchal family

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1. Your answer should highlight the following points:
 - Timocratic
 - Oligarchic
 - Democratic
 - Tyrannical