

Greek Political Thought: Analysing Platonian concept of Communism of Wives and Children

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Abstract

This paper analyses in a comprehensive way regarding Plato's concept of Communism of wives and property. Firstly a general observation has been made which shows that how communism of wives and children is essential for the guardian class. Thereafter a detailed description has been made regarding communism of wives and children and communism of property. After that shortcomings of this theory has been discussed. Thus this paper mentions about a very crucial aspect of Plato who is considered as teacher of father of Political Science, Aristotle

Key words – Communism of wives and children, Greek, Justice, Political, Philosophy, Western,

Plato's scheme of communism has two aspects. In book (iii), Plato propose the communism of property and in book (iv), he proposes the communism of Wives and children. It is only in the Republic that Plato proposes his scheme of Communism. In the statesman there is no reference to it and in the laws the Communism of property, wives and children is discussed as the highest kind of Social order but rather unworkable.

There are various reason for which Plato Propounded the theory of communism of property, wives and children. The first reason is that Plato looks to a sound system of state controlled education to train the guardians for their special work and to keep them unselfish to their duties. It would generate in them not only the sense that their first and foremost work is to secure the coherence and unity of the state but also they will think that their work is to maintain goodness in the citizens.

A famous scholar of political science, Sir Ernest Barker has described very effectively. According to Barker the scheme of communism is both ascetic and autocratic. It is a way of surrender and renunciation.

Plato has dread of worldly goods and of the instincts or temptations they create in man's mind. The guardians must be kept at an arm's length from such type of worldly things. They must not, therefore, own any property and must not set up separate families .they must share , what is

provided to them by the state for fulfilling their material needs , such as housing food and other necessities of life . Similarly they must have common wives and children.

Autocratic Communism of Plato Plato's communism is autocratic because it is surrender imposed on best and only on the best .communism exists for the sake of whole of the society. not for whole of society .it only exists for the sake of governing class. The guardians, forming the ruling class, would form only a small fraction of the total population in the state , but qualitatively they would be most select and the best section of the society .Since the quality of the state will depend on the ability of the ruling class, Plato proposes his scheme of communism only for the guardian class. The producing classes will have property and wives and this communism will not be applicable to them .Plato recommends to the guardians that they must not allow extremes of wealth and of poverty to enter in the state because poverty and wealth have a bad effect on the quality of the work and on the workman himself.

Plato not only imposes his scheme of communism on the guardians but also places severe restrictions on the way of life they have to live. It is life of austerity and self- abnegation. It is a life of self discipline and total dedication to the service of the state.

After discussing in general the theory of communism, now we discuss the impact on Plato's theory of communism of those practices which were prevailing at that time.

The Impact of Contemporary Theories- Plato's communism was not quite unfamiliar to his age. The Pythagoreans were, already practicing in the brotherhood groups. The might have inspired Plato's communism and would have suggested **the motto that friends good is common goods**. Perhaps the most immediate influence was that of SPARTA. Where the citizens took their meals on the common tables and war heroes were invited to beget children on other men's wives children were looked after by the state. It is quite possible that Plato might have borrowed his scheme of communism from Pythagoreans and SPARTANS.

Communism of Property – Realizing that private property was a stumbling block in the way of the unity of the state, he sought to eliminate it through communism of property. He feared that the possession of private property would give rise to selfish considerations and deviate the attention of the philosopher kings from public service. He therefore deprived the ruling classes from the right to property. Sabine says that to cure greed of the rulers no way should be of denying them the right to call anything their own. He insisted on that the rulers should live in the barracks and have meals on common tables. They should not own private property, because it

was to undermine the value of virtue. Which was the most important ingredient of the ruling class? Plato's theory of communism of property can be discussed under the following heads.

Preparing the Guardians – Plato looks to a sound system of state controlled education to train the guardians including both the warriors and rulers for their special task and to keep them unselfish to perform their duties.

It would generate in them the instinct that their first and foremost aim is to secure the unity and coherence of the state which means that they have no interests of their own apart from the interests of the state. Therefore Plato considers that guardians should not be given the right to acquire any private property. Their basic needs would be fulfilled by the state.

Life of Guardians- In the first place, none of them should have any property of their own. Neither should they have a private house or store. Provisions should be such that they should agree to receive from the citizens fixed rate of pay enough to meet expenses of the year and no more: and they will go to mess and live together like soldiers in a camp. They alone of all the citizens may not touch or handle silver or gold or be under the same roof with them who wear them, or drink from them. This will be their solution, and thus they would be the saviors of the state. Here one question is raised whether they should ever acquire private property in their life or money of their own. They will become housekeepers and husbandmen instead of guardians, enemies and tyrants instead of allies of the other citizens, hating and being hated, Plotting and being plotted against they would pass whole of their life in much great terror of internal than of external enemies.

Separation of Political Power and Economic Power - Plato convinced that nothing is more disastrous for the purity and efficiency of administration than the union of political power and economic power in same hands. If those who possess political power in the state have economic concerns of their own, they are sure to lead the path of selfishness.

Plato's theory of wives and children's communism – Plato discusses communism of wives and children in, what he calls, two waves, in the first wave he establishes the principle of equality of men and women. He compares the guardians to watch dogs, who watch and hunt together. So men and women who have to look after the community together must receive the same education and perform the same duties. This theory can be discussed under the following heads:

Exclusively for the Guardians class – Plato puts forward his scheme of communism of wives and children thus, guardians should be forbidden by law, says Socrates, “To live together in separate households and that wives should be held in common by all.” The institutions of marriage and family are abolished”

Children should be common to all – The second proposal of this theory is that children should be held in common, and no parents should know their child or child his parents. Plato is very clear that guardians should not indulge themselves in sex life except on occasion when they are reacquired by the senior guardians to mate and procreate children for meeting the needs of the community and the later generations. Even on such festivals only physically and mentally fit are chosen for mating purpose.

Plato describes even age limits within which such mating should take place. Both men and women selected breed children from his 20th to her 40th year. A man should beget children till the age of 55. These are the periods of life during which both men and women are physically as well as mentally healthy. Any children born to parents who fall outside these age limits would be destroyed by the state.

In order to prevent any conflict among the guardians, the senior guardians take utmost care. They would give the utmost care to the selection of mating partners on such festival which should be by a lot, not by the design of the senior guardians, though in reality the selection would be made after careful consideration of the physical and mental qualities of all the available guardians within the prescribed age limits.

Common upbringing of the children- The children when born would be taken away from their mothers and handed over to the nurses employed by the state. The children would not know their parents nor parents would know their parents, and the children born as a result of the festival would be called common children .there would be no future sex relationship among the mating partners. Unless they happen to be selected again for the mating.

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Evaluation of theory of communism- Plato's communism of wives and children would place greater burden of self –restraint upon the guardians than the institution of marriage lays down on husband and wives. Plato has proposed his theory of communism for various reasons and scholars have given their different views regarding his theory.

The guardians personifies the element of reason in their souls, appetite plays no part in their psychological makeup. As Plato says philosopher kings have gold in themselves and auxiliaries have silver therefore, they have no need of materialistic goods. They are ruled by reason and not by any need of appetite. According to Plato the highest kind of life was the common life, that of sharing things together. His scheme of communism served two purposes.

It provided a common life to the guardians and it served at the same time as a kind of protection against temptations of sensual pleasures. There are also reasons behind this theory. The best way to curb selfishness and to direct guardians to serve the state with a single minded dedication was to make them live the common life of common life of communism. The criticism of communism can be discussed under the following leads.

State is individual writ large: It is wrong on the part of Plato to treat state merely enlarged version of family.

He carried the organic conception too far and does not see any difference between family and the state. In fact there are fundamental difference between the two and it is wrong to treat the to as identical. State is not unity but plurality.

Communism of wives leads towards social disharmony – Aristotle says that Communism of wives is bound to lead to social disharmony and cause most harm to the interest of the community, the purpose which briefly guided Plato in advocating the same. Distributively one female cannot be the wife of all the guardians. Thus Plato's scheme of communism of wives is totally impracticable.

Children will not become healthy-The children under Plato's Communism shall not be able to grow into healthy and balanced children because they shall not be get the care and nourishment which is possible in family. It is well known to all that something which belongs to all is nobody's responsibility. The children brought up without parental affection and love shall have only dwarfed personalities and shall do more harm rather than good to community.

Destruction of Property and Family is Unnatural- Plato had the medieval dread of property and family. He saw in them the source of much evil and therefore proposed to abolish it.

Aristotle on the other hand finds them deeply rooted in human nature and see much good in them. He would not destroy them merely because of the evil use to which they can be put, and have something been put in the past. He wants us to preserve them and to use them properly. The evil not lies in woman but in man's passion or lust for woman. Nature has not given them us in vain. Aristotle criticizes the communism of Plato by saying that the communism of wives and children, if was practicable, had been presented by anyone before Plato. Aristotle thought that Plato was too ideal to believe the ideals of actual life. Nothing illustrates in better the fundamental difference between the temper of the great philosophers than their attitude towards family and property.

Proposal of Temporary matings is totally absurd – The concept of temporary marriages is neither logical nor desirable.

It is indeed difficult to imagine that men and woman may come together for sexual intercourse and then part for good. Similarly, the relationship between the child and the mother is one of affection and it cannot be treated as casually as Plato wants us to treat. The abolition of the institution of family is likely to give serious setback to the sentiments of love, charity, generosity and mercy.

Abolition of family – Plato proposes for the abolition of family which is absolutely absurd. Plato thinks that family is an obstacle in the way of love for the state. Therefore, he wants to abolish it. Thus abolition of family is contrary to all notions of human psychology and abolition of this institution cannot be all notions of human psychology and abolition of this institution cannot be justified. Family is not only a social but also a religious and ethical institution.

Despite the above mentioned criticism of Plato's theory of communism it cannot be denied that Plato seems to be logical in emphasizing that state could not get undivided loyalty unless the institution of family was done away with. But this theory is highly unrealistic and is totally beyond the realities of life. According to Barker, " By abolishing family and private property Plato destroyed that instrument by which an individual can be known given by professor Sabine thus " To a modern state there is something which is trifle startling about the wholly unsentimental way in which Plato argues from the breeding of domestic animals to the sexual relations of men and women. In fact, he demands a degree of control or self control that has never been realized among any large population. The unity of the state to be secured : Property

and family stand in the way, therefore property and marriage must goA family is one thing and a state is something different and it is better that one should not try to ape the other,”

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