

## **Plato's theory of Communism**

Plato's theory of communism is based on his belief of corrupting influences of family and property over people holding the public offices. It is aimed at freeing the ruling classes, i.e. the philosophers and the warriors from the institutions of family and property. According to Plato the longings for family and property make the rulers self-seeking, indulgent, greedy and corrupt and that is a diversion from and impediment to appropriate performance of their duty to rule.

The gist of Plato's communism is deprivation of all the members of the ruling classes, the guardians and soldiers from having any private property including private house, land or gold and silver (wealth). Their survival needs shall be taken care by the commodities collected from the producing classes in the form of taxes. They shall live in the state managed barracks and eat in the common mess. They shall be paid no salary or allowances, their essential needs shall be taken by the state. It is important to note that communism applies for only ruling classes and not for producing masses. Plato stated that the longing for property corrupts the rulers and makes them greedy and selfish that would lead to instability of the state. Also, according to Plato family and property were the chief sources of disunity and social tension.

Plato's arguments in defence of abolition of the institution of property among the ruling classes are not economic in terms of the nature of ownership of means of production and exchange, but moral, political and psychological. According to his basic assumptions of human nature and the principle of functional specialization, he states on moral grounds that everyone must accomplish one's nature of achieving the requisite end by transcending self-interest. Plato hold that individuals do not exist and act as individuals in the self-interest but exist as parts of collectivity (state) and must subordinate the self-interest to the collective.

Plato also argues the abolition of family. Family, according to him is linked with property and is equally distractive and corrupting as property. The rulers must not waste time and energy in family responsibility. The attachment to the family harms the absolute devotion to the state and concern for their offspring causes selfish tendencies detrimental to social unity and harmony. He believed that family would destroy a sense of cooperation that forms the

basis for a state. To destroy family, it is important to destroy selfishness. Plato wanted the rulers of an ideal state not to get distracted from their work and get tempted towards self-interests.

As property and family relationships seemed to be the main source of dissension in the society, Plato stated that neither of them must be given any recognition in an ideal state.

Through the abolition of these two aspects, Plato attempted to create a new social order wherein the ruling class surrendered both family and private property and embraced a system of communism. This practice of communism is only meant for the ruling class and the guardian class. However, Plato did not bind this principle on the third class, namely, the artisans. In other words, they were allowed to maintain property and family but were under strict supervision. Another question that was raised was related to those children who were born in a family. According to Plato, they would be the property of the state. Immediately after their birth, they would be taken to a nursery and nursed and nurtured there. Hence once children were born, they would be taken care of by the state-maintained nurseries. Except for the philosopher ruler, none would know the parentage of these children. Even the biological parents and their children would not know of the relationship.

### **Conclusion**

Critics state that in trying to ensure that family life was not corrupted with selfishness, Plato went to other extreme and eliminated the emotional bonding that the family provided. Plato's communism was ascetic, similar to the life found in a monastery.

Though one can say that Plato abolished private family and property for the guardian class, for they encouraged nepotism, favouritism, particularism, factionalism and other corrupt practices among rulers. Politics according to Plato did not mean promoting one's personal interests. Instead it was to promote the common good.

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