



# Plato's Communism Of Property And Family: An Inquiry Into Ideal Justice And Political Order In The Republic

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## Abstract:

Plato's proposals in The Republic for the abolition of private property and the family among the guardian class represent one of the earliest and most radical visions of political communism. These ideas, often referred to as Plato's "communism of property and family," reflect his philosophical pursuit of justice, unity, and harmony within the ideal state. This paper critically examines Plato's communistic proposals, their philosophical foundations, and the implications they hold for understanding justice, individual freedom, and social organization. Through a textual and interpretive analysis, the paper also explores major criticisms from Aristotle to modern scholars, highlighting the tension between the ideal and the practicable in Plato's political thought.

*Keywords: Communism, private property, family, guardian class, ideal state.*

## 1. Introduction

Plato's Republic is one of the most influential works in Western philosophy, outlining a vision of an ideal state governed by philosopher-kings. Among the most striking proposals in this vision is the abolition of private property and the traditional family among the guardian class. This form of communism, limited to the ruling elite, is meant to promote unity, eliminate selfish interests, and ensure justice within the polis. However, this concept has remained a subject of both admiration and criticism due to its radical nature and implications.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to critically examine Plato's proposition of the communism of property and family as presented in The Republic, especially in the context of ideal justice and political order. The specific objectives include:

1. To analyze Plato's rationale for abolishing private property and the traditional family structure among the guardian class.

2. To explore the philosophical underpinnings of Plato's communism within the larger framework of his theory of justice.
3. To investigate the feasibility, ethical implications, and political consequences of such communal arrangements.
4. To assess the relevance and limitations of Plato's communism in the context of modern political theory and social structures.

### 3. Review of Literature

Plato's Republic has invited extensive scholarly commentary over centuries, particularly concerning the radical proposals in Book V regarding communal property and the abolition of the nuclear family for the guardian class. Scholars such as Karl Popper in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* criticized Plato for laying the groundwork for totalitarian ideologies. Popper argued that Plato's system sacrifices individual freedom for the sake of order and unity.

On the other hand, Julia Annas in *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* interprets Plato's communism as an ethical ideal intended to eliminate conflicts of interest, thus ensuring justice and harmony. Melissa Lane and Terence Irwin have further emphasized the teleological nature of Plato's political philosophy, suggesting that communal arrangements serve the ultimate goal of the just soul and just state.

Aristotle, in *Politics*, critiqued Plato's communism for undermining natural affection and weakening the fabric of social life. Modern scholars such as Richard Kraut and Christopher Rowe have re-evaluated these critiques, suggesting a more nuanced understanding of Plato's intentions.

This review highlights that while Plato's communism has been a point of contention, it remains a powerful lens through which to understand ancient conceptions of justice, unity, and governance.

Mukhi's *Political Thought* (2014) presents a comprehensive overview of both Western and Indian political thinkers, aiming to make political philosophy accessible to undergraduate students. His interpretations are clear and educational, emphasizing normative ideas of justice, liberty, and political order. Mukhi places special focus on classical thinkers like Plato and Aristotle, while also engaging with modern ideologies, thereby offering a balanced mix of historical and conceptual learning.

Verma's *Modern Indian Political Thought* (2007) delves into the ideological evolution of Indian political thinkers during the colonial and post-colonial periods. The book critically analyzes the contributions of figures like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Gandhi, Nehru, Ambedkar, and M.N. Roy. Verma's emphasis on contextual analysis helps readers understand how socio-political realities shaped Indian ideologies. It is especially useful in understanding the indigenous development of modern political ideas.

Gaub's *An Introduction to Political Theory* (2019) offers a detailed and analytical approach to foundational concepts such as rights, democracy, liberty, equality, and justice. The book also includes discussion on emerging political ideologies and debates in global politics. Gauba combines theoretical exposition with critical analysis, making it suitable for students preparing for competitive examinations and academic research.

Appadorai's *The Substance of Politics* (2002) is a classic that systematically explores core elements of political theory, including the state, sovereignty, law, liberty, and democracy. Appadorai's work stands out for its simplicity and clarity in explaining complex ideas. His normative approach reflects the liberal tradition and continues to be widely cited in academic circles for its foundational insights.

Sharma's article, *Teaching Political Thought in Indian Universities* (2015), provides a comparative review of pedagogical methods and curricular structures in Indian institutions. He highlights the gaps in curriculum design, such as the overemphasis on Western thinkers and underrepresentation of Indian philosophical traditions. Sharma calls for a balanced, inclusive, and critical approach to teaching political thought.

Singh and Saxena's *Indian Politics: Contemporary Issues and Concerns* (2011) provides an analytical framework for understanding contemporary political developments in India. The book addresses issues such as secularism, federalism, caste politics, and governance. It complements theoretical texts by connecting political thought to current issues and policy debates, making it a valuable resource for contextual learning.

#### **4.Tools and Methodology of the Study**

This study adopts a qualitative and analytical research methodology, combining classical textual analysis with contemporary philosophical critique. The tools and methods used include: Secondary Sources such as peer-reviewed articles and books.

#### **5.The Philosophical Context of Plato's Communism**

Plato's communism must be understood within his broader metaphysical and ethical framework. The *Republic* seeks to define justice, both in the individual and the state. Plato posits a tripartite soul (reason, spirit, appetite) corresponding to three classes in society (rulers, auxiliaries, producers)<sup>1</sup>. Justice, for Plato, is each class performing its appropriate role without interfering with others.

To prevent corruption among the guardian class, Plato advocates for communal ownership and the dissolution of family ties. Guardians will live together, share possessions, and not know their biological children, thereby removing the incentives of nepotism, wealth accumulation, and family bonds.

#### **6. Communism of Property**

Plato developed his theory of communism of property based on both political and psychological foundations. He believed that, from a psychological perspective, it was crucial for the guardians, which included the rulers and the soldiers, should be freed from concerns related to mine and thine; the possessive tendencies of private ownership<sup>2</sup>. According to his philosophy as long as the rulers and the soldiers are not freed from this psychological burden they shall not become ideal kings.

From both political and economic standpoints, Plato maintained that power, especially economic power should be separated from the guardian class. Since the philosopher-ruler must be above personal interests, he should not hold significant political or economic power. Plato feared that a concentration of property and power in a few hands, even in those of philosopher-kings, might lead to tyranny or corruption<sup>3</sup>. The combination of political and economic power, he believed, could mislead a ruler and divert him from the path of truth and wisdom.

Plato firmly believed that private property should be abolished for two primary classes: the philosopher-kings and the soldiers. For the rulers, Plato feared that combining political authority with economic wealth would inevitably lead to tyranny. In the case of soldiers, he believed private ownership would encourage greed, moral

weakness, and a loss of patriotic duty. Personal property would divert their attention from defending the state against external threats and cause them to prioritize self-interest over the common good<sup>4</sup>.

Thus, Plato strongly advocated for the communal ownership of property among the ruling and military classes. He argued that the institution of private property would misguide these groups, and hence, they should be completely restricted from owning any personal wealth.

Communism of Property in Book V of the Republic, Plato argues that the guardians should "possess in common" all material goods. This proposal serves two purposes:

- Unity of the State: By eliminating private wealth, guardians are less likely to form factions or act in self-interest.
- Focus on the Common Good: Without personal property, guardians are better able to dedicate themselves entirely to the welfare of the state.

Plato asserts that "the greatest good in the city is that it be as unified as possible." Communal property is an institutional mechanism to bring about this unity<sup>5</sup>.

## 7. Communism of Family

Plato's abolition of the nuclear family among guardians is even more radical. Through state-controlled mating festivals, children are conceived anonymously and raised collectively. Parents do not know their children, and vice versa. The purpose of this arrangement is:

- Equality of Women and Men in Guardianship: By removing traditional family roles, Plato allows women to be educated and to serve as guardians.
- Impartial Governance: Guardians will not favor their own children or lineage.
- Promotion of Unity: As everyone sees everyone else as kin, social cohesion is strengthened.

Plato famously states, "These women are to be all in common to these men; no one is to have a private wife of his own, and the children are to be in common."<sup>6</sup>

Plato's concept excludes the peasants and artisans, applying only to a minority group made up of the two upper classes—soldiers and philosopher-kings.

His idea of the communism of family is also aimed at fostering unity within the state. Plato believed that the communal system of family life is a crucial condition for realizing justice and virtue in society<sup>8</sup>.

Since men and women are considered equal by Plato, he rejected the idea of permanent marriage. Instead, he proposed that both men and women should be free to engage in sexual relations as they choose<sup>9</sup>.

Plato argued that children should be the property of the state, not raised by individual parents. Rather than burdening parents with child-rearing responsibilities, he proposed that the state should raise children collectively, in ways that serve the best interests of the society as a whole<sup>10</sup>.

Plato suggested that children should be separated from their biological parents from birth to prevent them from forming emotional attachments. This would ensure that their loyalty lies with the state, not a private family, making them national assets rather than familial dependents<sup>11</sup>.



To promote unity among citizens, Plato recommended that all individuals live together in common barracks, avoiding private households and the isolation of nuclear families<sup>12</sup>.

## 8. Criticisms and Responses

Plato's communism has faced significant criticism over centuries:

- Aristotle (Politics, Book II): He argues that "what is common to the greatest number has the least care bestowed upon it." Aristotle believes that Plato's proposals undermine natural affections and reduce efficiency.
- Modern Liberal Critics: They argue that Plato's system suppresses individual rights and freedoms, valuing collective unity over personal autonomy.
- Feasibility Concerns: Critics question whether such a society could be practically sustained or would inevitably collapse into authoritarianism.

However, defenders of Plato interpret his communism not as a literal political blueprint but as a philosophical model to provoke thought on justice, corruption, and social responsibility.

## 9. Relevance and Legacy

Plato's vision remains relevant in discussions about inequality, social justice, and the role of the state in regulating private life. Although no society has fully implemented Plato's communism, elements of his critique of wealth and familial privilege echo in modern socialist and utopian thought.

His ideal raises perennial questions: Should rulers be above personal interest? Can justice flourish without economic and social equality? Can unity justify the suppression of individuality?

## 10. Conclusion

Plato's communism of property and family, as envisioned in the Republic, is an attempt to construct a perfectly just society by removing the root causes of division—private wealth and exclusive family bonds. While its radical nature invites valid criticism, it also serves as a profound critique of corruption and an aspirational model of civic virtue. Whether interpreted as a genuine political proposal or a philosophical allegory, Plato's communism continues to challenge contemporary assumptions about freedom, justice, and the ideal state.

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