

From Plato to Locke: The Development of Western Political Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Plato and Locke are two famous philosophers in the history. They both have their own political philosophy theory. Studying the different their theory is also studying the development of western political philosophy. This paper is to show the development of western political philosophy by finding out and analyzing the main ideal of Plato and Locke's political thoughts.

Keywords: *Plato, Locke, political philosophy, Of Civil Government, The Republic, personal property*

1. INTRODUCTION

Plato is one of the most well-known philosopher in the history. He is considered as the founder of western political philosophy. Likewise, Locke is one of the most influential thinkers in the seventeenth century. Voltaire even writes: perhaps no man ever had a more judicious or more methodical genius, or was a more acute Logician than Mr. Locke.[1] or Both of their works largely affected the development of western political philosophy. They both expressed their own view about individual and state.

This paper is organized into three main section. In the first section, the main point of Plato's political thoughts in "The Republic." is briefly summarized. In this book, Plato expresses his opinions on harmony and justice, as well as the analogy between soul and city, in which desire (appetite), courage (spirit), and reason corresponding to workers (producers), soldiers (auxiliaries), and guardians. Then unpersuasive or self-contradicted points in Plato's political thoughts will be listed and explained. In the second section, author writes about Locke's Major political views in his book "of civic government, including Locke's theory about the state of nature, property, freedom and how hard work contributes to the good of the whole. Third section would analyse some of Locke's view, which make his political thoughts different from Plato's political thoughts and show the development of western political philosophy. Mainly about their different attitude private property.

2. PLATO'S THEORY

2.1. Introduction of Plato's Theory

Plato's political thoughts are based on his ethical theory. He claims that society can only be good and justice when three groups of people in the society: workers, soldiers, and

leaders, each do their own job properly. Plato claims that each of the group has its own defining characteristic. Moreover, the characteristics of three groups of people in the society correspond to three faculties in the human "soul".

"Then it's in this way, my friend, that well claim that the single man—with these same forms in his soul—thanks to the same affections as those in the city, rightly lays claim to the same names." [2] The society as well as the human "soul" can only be harmony when their three characters correspond with each other. "Meddling among the classes, of which there are three, and ex-change with one another is the greatest harm for the city and would most correctly be called extreme evil-doing." [3]

2.2. Worker Class

In Plato's opinion, there need to be workers in every society. Workers are people like farmers or craftsman, people who produce things that people need everyday. A society without workers would loses its foundation. The reason is that society, like people, have basic needs. A society need crops, tools and buildings, just like a person needs food, clothe, and house.

Plato believes that workers are focus on their desires, and they are interested in satisfying needs of their body. Therefore, Plato concludes that worker's key feature is desire. Hence, Plato believes that workers need to be moderate. Because desire is not under control without moderation. If a person's desire is not under control, he or she might do many unwise things, like overeating or get drunk. Similarly, with out moderation, worker would only focus on satisfying their body. Workers who only focus on satisfying are not good workers. They would sleep too much, eat too much, play too much and drink too much. In this way, workers can not doing their job properly. If workers can not doing their job properly, they cannot produce enough things that people need everyday like crops and tools. Obviously, a society can never be flourish without enough things people need everyday. Therefore, Plato claims that a good or just

society need workers to be moderate workers.

2.3. Soldier Class

Plato believes that a class of workers with moderation that could satisfy the basic need of the society is not enough. If a society has good amount of wealth, other societies might want to take it. Hence, people would need protectors-- a class of soldiers. The soldiers would protect the society from external threats. The soldiers need to fight with enemies. Consequently, the soldiers would need to be in dangerous situations quite frequently. Therefore, soldiers need to be high spirit. So soldiers need to be emotional type of individual.

Then emotion is what characterizes the class of soldiers. The soldiers need to channel this high spirit in a certain direction, precisely by being courageous. Since soldiers might want to take over power and become the leader. In Plato's opinion, this kind of power switch would cause chaos in the society. Furthermore, for the same reason that workers need to be moderate, soldiers need to be moderate to doing their job, protect the society from external threats, properly. Therefore, in Plato's opinion, a good or just society need soldiers to be moderate and courageous.

2.4. Leader Class

For a good or just society, worker class and soldier class are not enough, their need to be a third class--leader class. Their main role will be think rationally, to use their reason or intellect to make decisions. As decision makers, leaders determine what the state is to do, how the affairs of the citizens are to be run. Therefore, the leaders need to be good at reasoning and think rationally. Hence, Plato believes that the leaders must be philosopher. The reason is that in Plato's opinion, philosophers are the only kind of people capable to think rationally and make reasonable decisions.

2.5. Summary of Plato's Theory

In Plato's system, the workers can not switch with soldiers, the soldiers can not switch place with the leader, neither. The three parts of the society can only be in harmony when three parts of the society do and only do their own job well. Plato's political rigime is too idealist and lack of feasibility. For example, to achieve his goal, Plato wants to destroy the private property and switch to public property. Destroy private property switch to public property would cause serious consequences. Almost all the movements that aiming to destroy the private property in the history end in failure. The reason is that these movements seriously damaged people's work motivation.

Without private property, people can not easily benefit from their own work, people who work harder and people who work less hard get same reward. The lack of work motivation later would cause economic crisis and food

shortage. Therefore, Plato's opinion about destroy the private property is unrealistic. Moreover, Plato wants destroy the marriage and the family, Even telling the kids "noble lie." These things are even more unpractical. Moreover, Plato did not explain why people want to be governed, since people could live freely by themselves. Hence, I found Plato's political theory not persuasive.

3. LOCKE'S THEORY

3.1. State of Nature

In Locke's political Theory, human used to be in the "state of nature." In the state of nature, every human is free and completely equal. Since man is born free.[4] Though human in the state of nature were free, they were not indulged. They are all ruled by nature law. The nature law forbid every human from hurting other human's life, health, liberty and property. Locke claims that state of nature is: a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man.[5] Locke claims that human were free within the bound of nature law. This kind of freedom is born with every human, no one else take it away from anyone. Locke's theory is actually very similar to the natural rights theory in the enlightenment movement.

3.2. The Emergence of Government

However, though the every human in state of nature is free and equal, the state of nature is not stable. Locke points out: Firstly, There wants an established, settled, known law, received and allowed by common consent to be the standard of right and wrong, and the common measure to decide all controversies between them. Secondly, In the state of nature there wants a known and indifferent judge, with authority to determine all differences according to the established law. Thirdly, In the state of nature there often wants power to back and support the sentence when right, and to give it due execution. They who by any injustice offended, will seldom fail, where they are able, by force to make good their injustice; such resistance many times makes the punishment dangerous, and frequently destructive, to those who attempt it.[6] Human in the state of nature could easily get into the "state of war" with other people. In the state of nature, one human might use violence to hunt other human's life, health, liberty or health property to benefit himself. The state cause serious danger to individuals in it.

To prevent or state of war, peoples get together and transferred part of their power to form an authority. This authority could help the people in the state of war and solve the conflicts. In this way, this authority could prevent and stop the state of war. This authority is the

government. According to Locke: People seldom find any number of men live any time together in this state. The inconveniences that they are therein exposed to, by the irregular and uncertain exercise of the power every man has of punishing the transgressions of others, make them take sanctuary under the established laws of government, and therein seek the preservation of their property.[7]

3.3. The Function of Government and Personal Property

Political activity for Locke is instrumental.[8] The reason is that Locke believes that government should create a free condition so that individuals could accomplish their own goals. Therefore, Locke points out that the government should protect people's life, liberty, health and property. The protection of personal property is an important point in Locke's theory. In Locke opinion, the hard work contributes the good of the whole. Locke believes that God gives the natural resources to all mankind. At the same time, God gives the rationality to the human. In this way, human could use their wisdom to transfer natural resources into things that are useful to the human.

For example, human cultivate land to gain crops. During the cultivation, human transfer natural resources, soil, into things that are useful to the humans, crops. Moreover, when someone uses his hard work transferring natural resources into something he can use, the things created become the property of this person. For example, the prey of the hunters was transferred from the natural resource of all mankind, wild animal, into hunters' personal property.

However, the least durable of tangible things are those needed for the life process itself.[9] if someone cannot use all the things he has before those things spoil, the things that would spoil do not belong to his personal property. The reason is that this person do not need so much things to live or consume. Therefore, this person takes his neighbor's share. Locke believes that a person has rights to own things created by his hard work. In addition, no one would working hard for things that he can not use. Therefore, the conflict about the personal property would not appeal easily. People are also less likely to violate the rights of others.

4. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PLATO AND LOCKE

There are several big difference between Locke and Plato, some of them is the reason that Locke is persuasive. Firstly, Locke explained why people want to be governed when they could live freely by themselves. Secondly, in Locke's political theory, each individual's life, health, freedom and property need to be protected. In this way, important things in modern society like protecting people's freedom and protecting minority's rights become possible. Thirdly, Locke's view about personal property is more realistic than Plato.

The reason is that besides motivating people to work, protecting the personal property is the guarantee of justice and people's freedom. "Where there is no property there is no justice"[10] Famous economist Hayek points out that our generation has forgotten that the system of private property is the most important guarantee of freedom.

It is only because the control of the means of production is divided among many people acting independently that we as individuals can decide what to do with ourselves. When all the means of production are vested in a single hand, whether it be nominally that of 'society' as a whole or that of a dictator, whoever exercises this control has complete power over us.[11] Therefore, government's protection to personal property is indispensable.

5. CONCLUSION

Plato expresses his opinion about the relationship between city-state and individual. His opinion including what kind of role individual should perform in the city state and how individual can perform these role well. Moreover, Plato uses three quality in the human "soul" to find out three quality that individual should have when they perform certain role in the society.

Similar to Plato, Locke discusses the relationship between government and individual. Unlike Plato, Locke did not require people having certain quality to impose social stability. Instead, Locke believes that the reign of "philosophy-king" is unreliable, human rights are more important than sovereignty, freedom is more practical than patriotism, law is more reliable than the president, and it is patriotic for citizens to criticize the government. From a modern perspective, although there still are some flaws in Locke's thought, no one can deny that Locke's thought is a great development of political philosophy.

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