

But the heavenly Love springs from a goddess whose attributes have nothing of the female, but are altogether male, and who is also the elder of the two, and innocent of any hint of lewdness.¹⁴

In *Laws*,¹⁵ Plato makes it clear that men and women are not to be treated equally in matters of succession. In the passage which follows, Athenian is discussing the matter with Clinias:

Our statute shall be to this effect. A person making written testamentary disposition of his effects, shall, if he have issue, first set down the name of such son as he judges proper to inherit. If he have another son whom he offers for adoption by a fellow citizen, he shall set his name down also. If there be still a son left, not already adopted as heir to any patrimony, who may expect in course of law to be sent to some overseas settlement, it shall be free to him to bequeath to such son such of his goods as he sees fit, other than his patrimonial estate and its complete plenishing. If there be more such sons than one, the father shall divide his possessions, other than his patrimony, among them in such proportions as he pleases. But if a son already possess a house, no portion of such goods shall be bequeathed to him, and the same shall hold in the case of a daughter; a daughter not contracted to a husband shall receive her share, but a daughter already so contracted shall receive none. If a son or daughter be found to have come into possession of an allotment of land subsequent to the date of the will, such party shall leave the bequest in the hands of the testator's heir. If the testator leave only female issue without male, he shall by will provide one daughter, selected at his pleasure, with a husband and himself with a son, and shall name such husband as his heir. If a man's son, naturally begotten or adopted, die in infancy before reaching the age of manhood, the testator shall further make provision for this contingency by naming a child to succeed such son with happier omens. If the party making his testament is absolutely childless, he may set aside one-tenth part of his acquired possessions for the purpose of legacies to any persons he pleases; all else shall be left to the adopted heir whom he shall make his son, in all integrity on the one part and gratitude on the other, with the law's approval.¹⁶

Aristotle adopts a very different stance from that of Plato, who in *The Republic* argues for the abolition of private property and the family – at least in relation to the 'upper classes', or Guardians. In *The Politics*, Aristotle starts with an enquiry:

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Aristotle

In a State, either all the citizens share all things, or they share none, or they share some but not others. It is clearly impossible that they should have no share in anything; at the very least, a constitution being a form of association, they must share in the territory, the single territory of a single State, of which single State the citizens are sharers. The question then becomes twofold: if a city is to be run well, is it better that all the citizens should share in all things capable of being

14 *Symposium*, 180d–181d.

15 Trans AE Taylor, in *Plato: the Collected Dialogues, op cit*, p 1225.

16 *Laws*, Book XI, 923d, e, 924a.

17 Trans TA Sinclair, revised TJ Saunders (Penguin Classics, 1981).

shared, or only in some of them and not in others? It is certainly quite possible for citizens to go shares with each other in children, in wives, and in pieces of property, as in *The Republic* of Plato. For in that work Socrates says that children, wives, and property ought to be held in common.¹⁸ We ask, therefore, is it better to do as we now do, or should we adopt the law proposed in *The Republic*?¹⁹

Aristotle's first objection to Plato's proposal relates to Socrates wish that the State 'should be as much of a unity as possible.'²⁰ This, argues Aristotle is unrealistic: 'the State consists not merely of a plurality of men, but of different kinds of men; you cannot make a State out of men who are all alike.'²¹ Extreme unity, according to Aristotle, as hypothesised by Plato, is unrealistic. Aristotle also recognises the strong desire which humans have for their own 'possessions':

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So, taken all round, the results of putting such laws as these in practice would inevitably be directly opposed to the results which correct legislation ought to bring about, and moreover to those that Socrates regards as the reason for ordering matters in this way for children and wives. For we believe that the existence of affectionate feelings in states is a very great boon to them: it is a safeguard against faction. And Socrates is emphatic in his praise of unity in the State, which (as it seems, and as he himself says) is one of the product of affection. In another of Plato's dialogues, one which treats of love, we read²² that Aristophanes said that lovers because of the warmth of their affection are eager to grow into each other and become one instead of two. In such an event one or other must perish, if not both. But in a State in which there exists such a mode of association²³ the feelings of affection will inevitably be watery, father hardly ever saying 'my son', or son 'my father'. Just as a small amount of sweetening dissolved in a large amount of water does not reveal its presence to the taste, so the feeling of relationship implied in these terms become nothing; and in a State organised like this there is virtually nothing to oblige fathers to care for their sons, or sons for their fathers, or brothers for each other. There are two impulses which more than all others cause human beings to cherish and feel affection for each other: 'this is my own', and 'this is a delight'. Among people organised in this manner no one would be able to say either.

Turning now to the good man, we find the same two qualities.²⁴ And this is true even though the self-control and justice exercised in ruling are not the same in kind.²⁵ For clearly the virtue of the good man, who is free but governed, for example, his justice will not be always the same: it will take different forms according to whether he is to rule or be ruled, just as self-control and courage vary as between men and women. A man would seem a coward if he had only

18 *Republic*, Book Four, 427c ff.

19 *The Politics*, Book II, 1260b.

20 *Republic*, Book Four, 422 ff, Book Five, 462a ff.

21 *The Politics*, Book Iii, 1261a22.

22 *Symposium*, 191a and 192d, e. On which see above at p 280.

23 Ie one like *The Republic's*, which, by holding wives and children in common, aims at excessive unity, as in the *Symposium*.

24 The knowledge and ability both to rule and be ruled.

25 Ie not the same as the self-control and justice exercised in being ruled.

the courage of a woman, a woman a chatterbox if she were only as discreet as a good man. Men and women have different parts to play in managing the household: his to win, hers to preserve. But the only virtue special to a ruler is practical wisdom; all the others must be possessed, so it seems, both by rulers and by ruled. The virtue of a person being ruled is not practical wisdom but correct opinion; he is rather like a person who makes the pipes, while the ruler is the one who can play them.²⁶

Aristotle makes it clear that in his view women are naturally inferior to men. Aristotle regards the 'household' as a crucial element within a State, and argues that as with the State, there must be a ruler – a master of the household. Moreover, it is clear that reproduction is the most important function assigned to wives.

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The Two 'Pairs'

We shall, I think, in this as in other subjects, get the best view of the matter if we look at the natural growth of things from the beginning. The first point is that those which are incapable of existing without each other must be united as a pair. For example, (a) the union of male and female is essential for reproduction; and this is not a matter of choice, but is due to the natural urge, which exists in the other animals too and in plants, to propagate one's kind. Equally essential is (b) the combination of the natural ruler and ruled, for the purpose of preservation. For the element that can use its intelligence to look ahead is by nature ruler and by nature master, while that which has the bodily strength to do the actual work is by nature a slave, one of those who are ruled. Thus there is a common interest uniting master and slave.

Formation of the Household

Nature, then, has distinguished between female and slave: she recognises different functions and lavishly provides different tools, not an all-purpose tool like the Delphic knife,²⁷ for every instrument will be made best if it serves not many purposes but one. But non-Greeks assign to female and slave exactly the same status. This is because they have nothing which is by nature fitted to rule; their association²⁸ consists of a male slave and a female slave. So, as the poets say, 'It is proper that Greeks should rule non-Greeks,'²⁹ the implication being that non-Greek and slave are by nature identical.

Thus it was out of the association formed by men with these two, women and slaves, that a household was first formed; and the poet Hesiod was right when he wrote, 'Get first a house and a wife and an ox to draw the plough'.³⁰ (The ox is the poor man's slave.) This association of persons established according to nature for the satisfaction of daily needs, is the household, the members of which

26 *The Politics* trans TA Sinclair (Penguin Books, 1981), Book IIIiv, 1277b16, p 182.

27 Evidently a knife capable of more than one mode of cutting, and not perfectly adapted to any one of them.

28 That is, of marriage.

29 Euripides, *Iphigeneia in Aulis* 1400.

30 *Works and Days* 405.

Charondas calls 'bread-fellows', and Epimenides the Cretan 'stable-companions'.^{31, 32}

When the allocation of roles within the household – that fundamental unit of the State – is considered, Aristotle is clear that the husband is 'the ruler' within the household:

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There are, as we say, three parts of household-management, one being the rule of a master,³³ which has already been dealt with, next the rule of a father, and a third which arises out of the marriage relationship. This is included because rule is exercised over wife and children – over both of them as free persons, but in other respects differently: over a wife, rule is as by a statesman; over children, as by a king. For the male is more fitted to rule than the female, unless conditions are quite contrary to nature; and the elder and fully grown is more fitted than the younger and undeveloped. It is true that in most cases of rule by statesmen there is an interchange of the role of ruler and ruled, which aims to preserve natural equality and non-differentiation; nevertheless, so long as one is ruling and the other is being ruled, the ruler seeks to mark distinctions in outward dignity, in style of address, and in honours paid. (Witness what Amasis said about his foot-basin.)³⁴ As between male and female this kind of relationship is permanent. Rule over children is royal, for the begetter is ruler by virtue both of affection and of age, and this type of rule is royal. Homer therefore was right in calling Zeus 'father of gods and men',³⁵ as he was king over them all. For a king ought to have a natural superiority, but to be no different in birth; and this is just the condition of elder in relation to younger and of father to son.³⁶

For Aristotle, women's role was primarily that of marriage, procreation and rearing of the healthiest possible future citizens. In this cause, Aristotle considers the regulation of sexual intercourse, reproduction and envisages abortion on eugenic grounds, in the interests of the State.

Now as it is a law-giver's duty to start from the very beginning in looking for ways to secure the best possible physique for the young who are reared, he must consider first the union of their parents, and ask what kind of people should come together in marriage, and when. In making regulations about this partnership he should have regard both to the spouses themselves and to their length of life, in order that they may arrive at the right ages together at the same time, and so that the period of the father's ability to beget and that of the mother's to bear children may coincide. A period when one of the two is capable and the other not leads to mutual strife and quarrels. Next, as regards the timing of the children's succession,³⁷ there should not be too great a gap in age between

31 Charondas was a law-giver of Catana, in Sicily, probably of the 6th century: Aristotle refers to him several times. Epimenides was a Cretan seer and wonder-worker of about 600.

32 *The Politics*, Book III, 1252a24–1252b9.

33 Over slaves.

34 Herodotus (II 172) relates how King Amasis of Egypt (6th century), being reproached for his humble origins, had a foot-basin refashioned into a statue of a god, which the Egyptians then worshipped – the moral being that it is what one is now that matters.

35 *Iliad* I, 144.

36 *The Politics*, Book I xii, 1259a37.

37 I.e., at their parents' death, to their estate – the culmination of a period of mutual service as between them and the children, facilitated by an age-gap neither too wide nor too narrow.

father and children; for then there is no good that the young can do by showing gratitude to elderly parents, and their fathers are of no help to them. Nor should they be too close in age, for this causes the relationship to be strained: like contemporaries, people in such a position feel less respect, and the nearness in age leads to bickering in household affairs. And further, to go back to the point we started from, one should ensure that the physique of the children that are produced³⁸ shall be in accordance with the wishes of the legislator.

All these purposes can be fulfilled, or nearly so, if we pay sufficient attention to one thing. Since, generationally speaking, the upper limit of age for the begetting of children is for men seventy years and for women fifty, the beginning of their union should be at ages such that they will arrive at this stage of life simultaneously. But the intercourse of a very young couple is not good for childbearing. In all animals the offspring of early unions are defective, inclined to produce females, and diminutive; so the same results are bound to follow in human beings too. And there is evidence that this is so: in States where early unions are the rule, the people are small in stature and defective. A further objection is that young women have greater difficulty in giving birth and more of them do. (Some say that here we have also the reason for the oracle given to the people of Troezen:³⁹ there is no reference to the harvesting of crops, but to the fact that the marrying of girls at too young an age was causing many deaths.) It is also more conducive to restraint that daughters should be no longer young when their fathers bestow them in marriage, because it seems that women who have sexual intercourse at an early age are more likely to be dissolute. On the male side too it is held that if they have intercourse while the seed is just growing, it interferes with their bodily growth; for the seed is subject to a fixed limit of time, after which it ceases to be replenished except on a small scale. Accordingly we conclude that the appropriate age for the union is about the eighteenth year for girls and for men thirty to seventy. With such timing, their unions will take place when they are physically in their prime, and it will bring them down together to the end of procreation at exactly the right moment for both.⁴⁰

Further, it is important that women should look after their bodies during pregnancy. They must not relax unduly, or go on a meagre diet. It is easy for a legislator to ensure this by making it a rule that they shall each day take a walk, the object of which is to worship regularly the gods whose office is to look after children. But while the body should be exercised, the intellect should follow a more relaxed regime, for the unborn infant appears to be influenced by her who is carrying it as plants are by the earth.⁴¹

With regard to the choice between abandoning an infant or rearing it, let there be a law that no cripple child be reared. But since the ordinance of custom forbids the exposure of infants on account of their numbers, there must be a limit to the production of children. If contrary to these arrangements copulation does take place and a child is conceived, abortion should be procured before the embryo

38 *Ta gennomena*, 'the children being produced'. In the first paragraph, probably of both born and unborn children; in the third, probably of born children only; in the fourth, of the unborn only (cf Plato *Laws*, 788c ff).

39 'Do not cut (ie plough) a new (ie young) furrow.'

40 *The Politics*, Book VII xvi, 1334b29–13335a6.

41 *Ibid* at Book VII xvi, 1335b12.

has acquired life and sensation; the presence of life and sensation will be the mark of division between right and wrong⁴² here.⁴³

Since we have already decided the beginning of the period of life at which male and female should enter their union, we must also decide upon the length of time during which it is proper that they should render the service of producing children. The offspring of elderly people, like the offspring of the unduly young, are imperfect both in intellect and in body; and those of the aged are feeble. We should therefore be guided by the highest point of intellectual development, and this in most cases is the age mentioned by certain poets who measure life by periods of seven years, that is to say about the fiftieth year of life.⁴⁴ Thus anyone who has passed this age for four or five years ought to give up bringing children into the world. But provided it is clearly for the sake of health or other such reason intercourse may continue.⁴⁵

As for extra-marital intercourse, it should, in general, be a disgrace to be detected in intimacy of any kind whatever, so long as one is a husband and so addressed. If anyone is found to be acting thus during the period of his begetting of children, let him be punished by such measure of disgrace as is appropriate to his misdemeanour.⁴⁶

WOMEN IN WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT

*Philosopher Queens and Private Wives*⁴⁷

Susan Moller Okin⁴⁸

The aim of the true art of ruling, as Plato conceives of it, is not the welfare of any single class or group, but the greatest possible happiness of the entire community.⁴⁹ 'Happiness', however, can be a misleading word, for if it leads us to thoughts of freedom, individual rights, or equality of opportunity, we are far from Plato's idea of happiness (eudaimonia). Neither equality nor liberty nor justice in the sense of fairness were values for Plato. The three values on which both his ideal and his second-best cities are based are, rather, harmony, efficiency and moral goodness: the last is the principal key to his entire political philosophy. Because of his belief in the intrinsic value of the soul, and the consequent importance of its health, Plato does not think that happiness results from the freedom to behave just as one wants; it is regarded as in no way attainable independently of virtue. Statesmen, therefore, should 'not only preserve the lives of their subjects but reform their characters too, so far as human nature permits of this'.⁵⁰ Though the ultimate aim of the true ruler is the happiness of all his subjects, the only way he can attain this is by raising them all, by means of education and law, to the highest possible level of wisdom and virtue.

42 *To hosion kai to me* – literally 'that which is holy/lawful/permitted, and that which is not'.

43 *Ibid* at 1335b19.

44 Ie the husband's.

45 *The Politics*, Book VII xvi, 1335b26.

46 *Ibid*, Book VII xvi, 1335b38.

47 *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton University Press, 1979), Chapter 2.

48 At the time of writing, Professor of Political Science at Stanford University.

49 *The Republic* at 420b.

50 *Statesman* at 297b; cf *Laws* at 630c, 644–645; 705d–706a, 707d; *Euthydemus*, 292b–c; see also Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (London, 1961), pp 34–36.

The gravest of all human faults, however, is considered by Plato to be one that is inborn in most people – that ‘excessive love of self’ which is ‘the cause of all sins in every case’.⁵¹ ‘Worse still, whereas the soul, and next the body, should take priority, the all too prevalent tendency is to give one’s property – in truth the least valuable of possessions – one’s greatest attentions.’⁵² Thus the ruler’s task in promoting his subjects’ virtue is two-fold. He must aim to overcome both their extremes of self-love and also their fatal preference for material possessions over the welfare of their souls. A person who is to be virtuous and great must be able to transcend his own interests, but above all to detach himself from the passion to acquire. As Glenn Morrow has noted, there is abundant evidence in both the *Republic* and the *Laws* that Plato regarded the maintenance of a temperate attitude toward property as essential for the security and well-being of a State.⁵³ It was acquisitiveness, after all, that had led the first city Socrates depicted – the simple, ‘true’ and ‘healthy’ city – into war with its neighbours and all the complications which this entailed. Again, the recurrent theme of Book VIII of the *Republic*, in which the process of political degeneration is analysed, is the corruption that results from increasing possessiveness.⁵⁴

The Republic is an extremely radical dialogue. In his formulation of the ideal state, Plato is prepared to question and challenge the most sacred contemporary conventions. The solution he proposes for the problem of selfishness and divisive interests is for private property and hence private interests to be abolished, to the greatest possible extent. For in this city, not just the harmony but the unity of interest is the objective. ‘Have we any greater evil for a city’, asks Socrates, ‘than what splits it and makes it many instead of one? Or a greater good than what binds it together and makes it one?’ He concludes that the best-governed city is that ‘which is most like a single human being’.⁵⁵ Nothing can dissolve the unity of a city more readily than for some of its citizens to be glad and others to grieve because of the same happening, so that all do not work or even wish in concert. The way to achieve the highest possible degree of unity is for all the citizens to feel pleasure and pain on the same occasions, and this ‘community of pleasure and pain’ will occur only if all goods are possessed in common. The best-governed city will be that ‘in which most say ‘my own’ and ‘not my own’ about the same thing, and in the same way’.⁵⁶

We need have no doubt that, if he had thought it possible, Plato would have extended the communal ownership of property to all the classes of his ideal city. The first of the ‘noble lies’, according to which all the citizens are to be told that they are one big family, can be read as the complete expression of an ideal which can unfortunately be met only in part. It is because of his belief in the tendency of most human beings to selfishness that Plato considers the renunciation of private property to be something that can be attained only by the best of persons. This is made clear in the *Laws*, where he rejects the possibility of eliminating ownership for the citizens of his projected ‘second-best’ city, since tilling the soil in common is ‘beyond the capacity of people with the birth, rearing and training we

51 *Laws*, 731e.

52 *Laws*, 743d–e.

53 Morrow, *Plato’s Cretan City: A Historical Interpretation of the Laws* (Princeton, 1960), p 101; see also *Laws* at 736e cite.

54 *Republic*, 372e–373e, and viii passim.

55 *Republic*, 462a–e.

56 *Republic*, 462a–e.

assume'.⁵⁷ What is impossible for the citizens of the second-best city, with all their carefully planned education, must regretfully be regarded as beyond the capacity of the inferior classes in the ideal city. Thus it is the guardian class alone which is to live up to the ideal of community of property and unity of interests.⁵⁸

The overcoming of selfish interests is regarded as most necessary for those who are to have charge of the welfare and governance of all the other citizens, quite apart from the fact that they are the best equipped to overcome them. Since a person will always take care of what he loves, the guardians, especially, must love the whole community, and have no interests other than its welfare. For them above all, then, the permitted property arrangements must be 'such as not to prevent them from being the best possible guardians and not to rouse them up to do harm to the other citizens'.⁵⁹ The possession by the rulers of private lands and wealth would, Plato argues, inevitably lead to the formation of factions, and make of the rulers 'masters and enemies instead of allies of the other citizens'.⁶⁰ The combination of wealth and private interests with political power is intolerable and can lead only to the destruction of the city.

Plato's ideal for the guardians is expressed by the proverb, 'friends have all things in common'.⁶¹ But if communal ownership of inanimate property is a great aid to the required unity of the city, it appears to follow that communal ownership of women and children will conduce to even greater unity. It is quite clear from the way Plato argues that he regards the communalisation of property as implying the simultaneous abolition of the family. He does not regard the two as distinct innovations requiring independent justifications. In fact, the first mention of the abolition of the family is slid over, almost as a parenthesis,⁶² and both in the *Republic* and the brief summary that is presented in the *Laws*, the two proposals are justified by the same arguments and frequently at the same time. In the *Laws*, especially, in the passages where Plato looks back to the institutions of the ideal city, the classification of women and children together with other possessions occurs frequently. Thus he talks of 'community of wives, children, and all chattels', and later, by contrast, of that less desirable state of affairs in which 'women and children and houses remain private, and all these things are established as the private property of individuals'.⁶³

Thus women are classified by Plato, as they were by the culture in which he lived, as an important subsection of property. The very expression, 'community (or common having) of women and children', which he uses to denote his proposed system of temporary matings, is a further indication of this, since the phenomenon could just as accurately be described as 'the community of men', were it not for its inventor's customary way of thinking about such matters'.⁶⁴

Just as other forms of private property were seen as destructive of society's unity, so the concept of 'private wives' is viewed by Plato as divisive and subversive in the same way. Thus, in contrast to the unified city he is proposing, he points to

57 *Laws*, 739c–740a.

58 *Republic*, 416c–417b.

59 *Republic*, 416c–d.

60 *Republic*, 417a–b.

61 *Republic*, 423e; *Laws*, 739c.

62 *Republic*, 423e.

63 *Republic*, 423e, 462, 464; *Laws*, 739c, 807b.

64 cf Grube, *Plato's Thought* (London, 1935), p 89.

those institutional arrangements which foster the ascendance of particularism and factionalism, with 'one man dragging off to his own house whatever he can get his hands on apart from the others, another being separate in his own house with separate women and children, introducing private pleasures and grieves of things that are private'.⁶⁵ Again, in the *Laws*, he strikes out at the same time against Athenian practices with regard both to private property and to women: 'we huddle all our goods together, as the saying goes, within four walls, and then hand over the dispensing of them to the women'.⁶⁶ It is clear that conventional marriage and woman in her traditional role as guardian of the private household were seen by Plato as intimately bound up with that whole system of private possessions which separated citizens from each other, made them hostile and envious, and was the greatest impediment to the unity and well-being of the city.

It is in Book VIII of the *Republic*, however, as Plato reviews the successively degenerate forms of the political order, that we can see his association of the private possession of women with corruption at its most graphic. Just as women were communalised at the same time as other property, so are they now, without separate explanation, made private at the same time as other property, as the course of the city's degeneration is described. Once private, moreover, women are depicted as hastening the course of the decline, due to their exclusive concern with the particular interests of their families. First, when the rulers begin to want to own land, houses and money, and to set up domestic treasuries and private lovenests, they will fail as guardians of the people, and the city will start to degenerate. Thereafter, the private possession of women is depicted as a major cause of further corruption. The mother's complaints that her husband's lack of concern for wealth and public prestige disadvantages her among the other women make the timocratic youth begin to despise his worthy father and to feel challenged into showing that he is more of a man. The wife, then, with her selfish concerns, who 'chants all the other refrains such as women are likely to do in cases of this sort', is, like Pandora, the real originator of the evils that follow.⁶⁷

The fact that Plato identifies the abolition of the family so closely with the communalisation of property, and does not appear to regard the former as an emotional deprivation of any more severity than the latter, must be understood in the context of the functions and status of the family in contemporary upper-class Athenian life. In view of the chattel status of Athenian women, and the 'peculiarly close relation thought to hold between a family and its landed property', Plato's intertwining of two issues which appear to us to be much more distinct is not hard to explain. As we have seen, it was almost impossible for husbands and wives to be either day-to-day companions or emotional and intellectual intimates. Consequently, as recent scholars of Greek life agree, 'the family does not bulk large in most Greek writing, its affective and psychological sides hardly at all', and 'family life, as we understand it, hardly existed' in late fifth century Athens.⁶⁸ The prevailing bisexuality meant that 'two complementary institutions coexisted, the family taking care of what we may call

65 *Republic*, 464c–d.

66 *Laws*, 805e.

67 *Republic*, 547b, 548a.

68 M. I. Finley, *The Ancient Greeks* (New York, 1963), pp 123–24; Ehrenberg, *Society and Civilization in Greece and Rome* (Cambridge: Mass, 1964), p 59.

the material side, pederasty (and the courtesan) the affective, and to a degree the intellectual, side of a man's intimate life'.⁶⁹

On the other hand, while the family was certainly no centre of the upper-class Greek's emotional life, it did function in ways that the modern family does not – ways which rendered it potentially far more socially divisive. The single-family household had emerged from the clan in comparatively recent times, and it was only gradually that the polis was gaining the loyalty that had previously belonged to the once autonomous clan. Antigone represents the paradigm of this conflict of loyalties, and there were in fact various areas of life where it had not yet become clear whether family or civic obligations should prevail. The extent to which the victim's kin, rather than the rulers, were responsible for ensuring that crime was properly avenged is well documented in the *Laws*.⁷⁰ Again, the predominance of duties to parents over any notion of legal justice is clearly indicated in the *Euthyphro*, where Socrates is incredulous that a man could even think of prosecuting his own father for the murder of anyone who was not a relative.⁷¹ Despite its minimal functioning as an emotional base, then, the Athenian family of the early fourth century, as a firm economic entity and the focus of important duties, constituted an obviously divisive force and potential threat to civic loyalty.

Those Plato scholars who have expressed profound horror at the idea that the family be abolished and replaced by those mating arrangements designed to produce the best offspring seem to have treated the issue anachronistically, by neglecting to consider the function of the family in Athenian life. When Grube, for example, objects to the system of temporary matings advocated for the guardians as 'undesirable because it does violence to the deepest human emotions' and 'entirely ignores the love element between the 'married' pair',⁷² he seems to forget that at the time the family was simply not the locus for the expression of the deepest human emotions. Even a cursory knowledge of the *Symposium*, with its deprecating comparison of those who turn their love toward women and raise families with those whose superior spiritual love is turned toward boys and philosophical searching, reveals that Plato and his audience would not have regarded the abolition of the family as a severe limitation of their intimate lives. Stranger still is the attitude taken by Leo Strauss, who not only assumes that the family is 'natural' and any move to abolish it 'convention', but makes the issue of whether the abolition of the family is possible or not into an acid test for determining the feasibility of the entire ideal State.⁷³ Those passages of *The Republic* to which he refers in order to demonstrate the supposed 'fact that men seem to desire naturally to have children of their own' are quite remarkably inadequate to prove his point. Moreover, his objection that Plato's controls on heterosexual behaviour means that 'the claims of eros are simply silenced' implies a complete denial of the prevailing homosexual ethos of the time. It is in fact very probable that Plato's audience would have regarded the ideal State's restrictions on their homosexual behaviour as far more repressive of their sexual feelings than the abolition of the family and the controls placed on heterosexual intercourse.

69 Finley, *The Ancient Greeks*, p 124.

70 *Laws*, eg 866 and 873e.

71 *Euthyphro*, 4a–b.

72 *Plato's Thought*, *op cit*, p 270; see also AE Taylor, *Plato, the Man and his Work* (London, 1926; 7th ed, 1960), p 278.

73 On Plato's *Republic*, in *The City of Man*, p 117.

The same scholars – Grube, Taylor and Strauss – who reject the abolition of the family as impossible, are those most intolerant of the proposed alternative, in which partners are chosen for each other supposedly by lot but, in fact, for eugenic purposes. Those who reject such proposals as quite impracticable, given human nature, because of their ‘intolerable severity’⁷⁴ would do well to consider the position of respectable Greek women. For they were just as controlled and deprived with respect to their sexual lives as both sexes of guardians were to be in the ideal city, and without having available to them the compensations of any participation in life outside the domestic sphere. The Greek woman was not permitted to choose her sexual partner, any more than Plato’s guardians were. Moreover, in her case the partner had not only the absolute right to copulate with and reproduce via her for the rest of her life, but also all the powers which her father had previously wielded over her. Once married, a woman had no condoned alternative sexual outlets, but was entirely dependent on a husband who might have any number of approved hetero or homosexual alternatives, for any satisfaction that he might choose to give her. The extent of the double standard is clearly brought into relief by the fact that the Greek word for adultery meant nothing but sexual intercourse between a married woman and a man who was not her husband. Needless to say, the punishments were very severe. Even if her husband died, a woman had no control over her life or her body, since she was returned to the custody of her father or guardian, who could remarry her at his pleasure. Alternatively to marriage, a citizen could give his sister or daughter into concubinage, whence she could be sent to a brothel, without any reproach to her owner.⁷⁵

If Athenian women of the highest class, living in one of the most highly cultured societies the world has known, could be controlled and deprived to this extent, it is hardly arguable that the exigencies of human nature render the Platonic mating system, with its requirement of supposedly ‘unnatural continence’,⁷⁶ impossible to enact. Women’s sexual lives have been restricted throughout the greater part of world history, just as rigidly as Plato proposes to control the intimate lives of his guardians. ‘The claims of eros’ have been ‘simply silenced’ in women with considerable success. It is apparent from much of the history of the female sex that, with a suitable indoctrination and the backing of strong sanctions, human beings can be conditioned to accept virtually any extent of control on their sexual and emotional lives. The point is, of course, that the scholars concerned have used the terms ‘human emotions’ and ‘human nature’ to refer only to men. What seems really horrific to Grube, Taylor and Strauss is that whereas the Greeks, like many other peoples, merely reserved women for the production of legitimate issue and controlled their lives accordingly, Plato has dared to suggest that the sexual lives of both male and female guardians should be controlled for the purpose of producing the best possible off-spring for the community.

The significance of Plato’s abolition of the family is profound, and the proposal has been echoed by a number of subsequent theorists or rulers of Utopian societies that depend to a very high degree on cohesion and unity. As Stanley Diamond has asserted, in an illuminating essay which analyses the significance

74 Taylor, *op cit*, p 278; see also Grube, *op cit*, p 270, and L Strauss, *The City of Man* (Chicago, 1964), p 117.

75 J Ithurriague, *Les Idées de Platon sur la condition de la femme au regard des traditions antiques* (Paris, 1931), p 53.

76 Grube, *op cit*, p 270.