

THE CONCEPT OF JUSTICE ACCORDING TO PLATO

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MAY, 2023

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The concept of justice is not a term that can be sharply defined in conceptual terms. Therefore, it is not really possible to define justice and draw its boundaries. To say something about justice, we either express the idea and feeling of being just from our own perspective, or we refer to the definition provided by a philosopher. This, in turn, becomes a subjective definition depending on the person's thoughts and emotions. Of course, it is not only a product of thoughts and emotions, but also influenced by the period and conditions in which it is experienced. However, as with any concept, it is presented with its objective aspects along with its subjective aspect. It is also possible to observe changes between these objective and subjective aspects depending on individuals or periods.

The purpose of this article is to determine and interpret how Plato defines and interprets the concept of justice in his work titled "The Republic." Plato often defines his social or state-related terms by associating them with the human body or inner world, and he tries to base these definitions on the harmony in the individual's inner world. Just as he associates forms of government with human characters, he exhibits a similar approach in the concept of justice.

Let's begin the definition with the individual's thoughts: The human soul consists of three parts: reason (rational), will (spirited), and desires (appetitive). Reason represents the individual's ability to think, understand, and make rational decisions. Will represents the individual's ambition, passion, and strength of will. Desires represent the individual's bodily desires, impulses, and cravings. According to Plato, justice signifies the harmony between the individual's inner order and the order of society. The inner justice of an individual is achieved through a balance among reason, will, and desires.

According to Plato, the internal justice of an individual should be governed by reason. Reason should control the will and desires and guide them in the right direction. Reason is a guiding principle that seeks truth, virtue, and wisdom. The will should be directed by reason and act in accordance with it. Desires should be brought into harmony with reason and kept under control.

The internal justice of an individual is achieved through the balance and harmony among reason, will, and desires. Reason controls the will and directs it in the right direction, while desires are aligned with reason. This balance brings inner peace and harmony to the individual. According to Plato, the internal justice of an individual is reflected in the external world. The internal justice of an individual is important for the establishment of justice in society. If the internal justice of individuals is achieved, the establishment of justice in society becomes more possible.

Plato's understanding of internal justice aims at leading a virtuous life. Living a virtuous life entails living in harmony with reason, will, and desires. The internal justice of an individual plays a significant role in self-awareness, exhibiting virtuous behavior, and making correct decisions. Plato's understanding of internal justice is realized through the establishment of a balance and harmony among reason, will, and desires. This balance brings inner peace and harmony to the individual and is also seen as a fundamental element for the establishment of justice in society.

According to Plato, the reflection of individuals achieving internal balance is the possibility of justice in society. However, in our present day, as those who are aware of laws, it

does not seem very feasible to us. I believe that having the concept of justice is necessary, but it is an ideal and ideals are not often found in reality. That is why characteristics and a penal system are needed for laws. When we look at the societal level of justice, we will see that it is more of a structure dependent on individuals rather than a systemic concept of justice, corresponding to the notion of merit that we refer to as "*liyakat*"¹ today.

Plato defines justice as the fulfillment of an individual's duties performed correctly and the fulfillment of appropriate duties to each individual by society. In a society, justice is achieved when everyone performs the right duty according to their abilities and upbringing. Plato argues that society should be divided into three classes: rulers, guardians, and producers. Each class has specific duties and roles, and fulfilling these duties correctly forms the basis of justice. In order to establish a foundation for dividing society into classes, Plato invents a myth related to the nature of human creation. This myth is known as "The Myth of the Metals."

According to this myth, the nature of human creation is different, and they are made from different elements. Humans are like the parts of a cube made from different metals. Some people are made of gold, while others are made of silver, and some are made of iron. These differences represent the variations observed in their nature and abilities. Those created from gold form the ruling class. They are bestowed with the abilities of governance and leadership. Those created from silver are called the guardian class or warriors. They possess defense and combat skills. Those created from iron are known as the producer class or laborers. They are the individuals working in economic production and the service sector.

Plato's myth reflects the idea that society should have a functional structure. The cube created by the combination of different materials like gold, silver, and iron signifies that each class has a specific role and responsibility. Rulers should govern, warriors should protect, and laborers should produce and serve. According to Plato, in an ideal state, the nature and abilities of individuals should be identified correctly and each individual should be placed in a manner compatible with the functioning of society. This, in a way, establishes justice. Plato's division of society into classes may seem contradictory to the principle of equality, but it does not contradict reality. Each individual has their own nature and inclinations based on their upbringing, which leads to a distribution and formation of society.

Moreover, Plato allows for vertical mobility between these classes based on individual abilities. I believe that his purpose in creating such a class structure is to establish order in a static framework and, consequently, to achieve justice. However, although it appears possible in theory, it is not practical. According to Plato, justice ensures the functional operation of society. Since each class has its own specific duties and abilities, the proper fulfillment of these duties by each individual maintains the balance and harmony of society. In cases where justice is violated, unrest, conflict, and disorder arise within society.

By shaping the structure from the very beginning according to human nature, and by dividing it into classes and distributing tasks, Plato believed that justice could be achieved, which we can now express as the principle of merit or giving the job to the most qualified. This definition of justice is solely concerned with establishing social order and distributing tasks. It is a matter of fact. However, it does not address the stance to be taken in response to a particular

¹ The word "*liyakat*" carries the meanings of being deserving, knowledgeable, and competent. For example, demonstrating "*liyakat*" implies achieving success in a task. Being suitable, talented, and capable for any job also means being "*liyakat*" holder.

event. The intention is to rely on competent individuals within each class to make judgments based on the subject matter of the event. Therefore, it is expected that individuals' classes are determined correctly according to their nature from the outset, and they fulfill the requirements of their class with competence.

In conclusion, we can say that Plato places the foundation of justice on human nature and the merit of the individual derived from their inclinations. When we look at the perception of justice in societies, we can draw the conclusion that it implies maintaining everything as it is. However, this is merely a condition of justice imposed for the sake of existence. It is a demand for justice that is required to preserve things in their current state. I believe that justice should not be confined to what exists, but rather to what should exist. Therefore, injustices arise in what exists, and justice is established in accordance with what should be. We can observe that Plato, in his constructed framework, builds justice upon what should be. Because injustices arise from what exists and are rectified by what should be.