

# Plato

Plato, the most gifted student of Socrates, born in 427 BC and died at the ripe age of 80 years in 347 BC belonged to an aristocratic family of Athens. Sometimes, between 388 and 369 BC he founded his school of philosophy called the Academy. The tragic end of his teacher, Socrates filled him with a scorn of democracy, such a hatred of the mob, as even his aristocratic lineage and breeding had hardly engendered in him, and it led him to a resolve that democracy must be destroyed, to be replaced by the rule of the wisest and the best. It became the absorbing problem of his life to find a method whereby the wisest and the best might be discovered and then enabled and persuaded to rule.

His most important work is called the Republic (divided into 10 parts of books) is a great contribution to the subject of politics placed under the domination of ethics. The subject of 'righteousness' constitutes the keynote of the whole treatise written by Plato to justify the case of an ideal state. True to say that, according to Plato, there is no distinction, except one of convenience, between morals and politics. The laws of right are the same for classes and cities as for individual men. But one must add that these laws are primarily laws of personal morality; politics is founded on ethics on politics.

**Ideal State: A three class Polity under the Sovereignty of Reason:** The most outstanding contribution of Plato's political thought, as contained in the Republic, is the representation of human life in a state perfected by justice and governed according to the idea of the good. The factors like excessive individualism of the sophists, democracy ruled by ignorance and the political selfishness existed in the contemporary Greek society motivated him to think of an Ideal State. The cure of these grave political ills is found by Plato in the scheme of separation of functions and specialisation of the job contained in the principle of justice. These aim of Plato is thus to eradicate the evils of ignorance, amateurishness and political selfishness causing civil discord and disunity; his watchdog is the idea of division of labour and specialisation of functions resulting in the unification of the civil life. He thus draws a grand picture of an ideal state having three classes-rulers, fighters, farmers- (men of gold, men of silver and men of brass)- each having its allotted sphere and each concentrating itself entirely upon the discharge of that functions. Government, defence, sustenance-the three necessary functions of the state-are all made into professions and assigned to professional classes.

Three Elements of Human Personality	Three Varieties of Human beings	Three Classes of Social Order
Reason (Philosophy)	Men of Gold—Rulers (Philosophers)	Rational Class (Guardians)
Spirit (Courage)	Men of Silver-Soldiers (Fighters)	Military Class (Auxiliary Guardians/Guards)
Desire (Appetite)	Men of Iron and Brass- (Husbandmen, Traders and Workers)	Economic Class (Toilers and Artisans)

## **Justice: Doctrine of Proper Stations**

Justice, having its meaning in the word 'righteousness' is the hinge of Plato's political thought contained in the Republic. Plato sees in the application of the principle of justice the only remedy for saving his beloved country from decay and ruin. He was agitated as his country had the

elements like amateurishness, meddlesomeness and political selfishness. Indeed Plato's Republic is a sustained search for such a remedy. Herein we also find a masterly refutation of all individualistic notions of the predecessors and contemporaries of Plato who considered individual as a selfish creature of the political community. The doctrine of proper stations is, therefore, a bold reply to the challenge of the evil of amateurish meddlesomeness characteristic of direct democracy and political selfishness characteristic of both democracy and aristocracy.

Platonic justice is not treated as a legal concept; it has an ethical and a philosophical character. It simply means that one individual should perform only one function and the function that is best suited to his natural aptitude without meddling with the function of another. In other words, justice implies a life of the people conforming to the law of functional specialisation. Justice is no mere function of the law court: it is equality and its function. It is equality, for it means nothing more and nothing less than man's performance of the part which the purposes of society that he shall pay. It is function, his function, for only he can discharge it adequately.

Plato's justice is contained in the scheme of separation and specialisation of functions based on the three-class polity of his ideal state. In other words, it implies a specialised division of labour touching the point of perfection. It consists in the proper fulfilment of one's duties at his appointed place and, therefore, it is but another name for the right discharge of specific functions attached to his particular station. In this way justice means doing one's work and not meddling with what belongs to others. Likewise, justice is the will to fulfil the duties of one station and not to meddle with the duties of another station and its habitation, is therefore, in the mind of every citizen who does his duty in his appointed place.

The original principle underlying Plato's scheme of specialisation is that one man should practise one thing only and the thing to which his nature is best suited. Justice becomes the proper fulfilment of one's duty at a proper station.

- When we call a **man wise**, we mean he has the power of understanding what is for his real interest as a whole man; when we call a **state wise**, we ought to mean that the men who have the gift for governing have their understanding entirely set upon the interest of the whole state.
- A **brave man** is one who has the courage of his opinions, that is one who will carry out his principles, whether those principles are the result of his own reason or received from others; and a **brave state** is one where the men who have to defend it have the courage to carry out the laws and principles imposed by constituted authority.
- By a **temperate or self-controlled** man we mean one in whose soul there is harmony and no internal conflict between different parts of the nature; and by a **self-controlled state** we mean one in which social order rests upon general agreement.

In order to give a proper definition of justice, Plato pursues aphaeretic method. He takes up one notion and goes ahead after refuting it with the sharpness of his argument in the following manner:

1. First, we find the refutation of the notion of traditional morality represented by Cephalus and his son Polemarchus.

Philosophers	Concept of Justice
Cephalus	"Speaking truth and paying debt"
Polemarchus	"Being an art doing good to the friends and bad to enemies"
Socrates	"Not an art or a technique but a quality of

the soul and a habit of mind connoting an idea of service to the whole society.”

**Plato through Socrates: he refutes by saying how it can be possible to have the real distinction between a friend and a foe and that it would never be an act pertaining to the principle of justice to restore weapons to a man who has gone mad, though he may be a bonafide owner of them. Hence this may be invented by tyrants with a great opinion of one's own power.**

2. Plato refutes the radical view of justice:

Thrasymachus	Socrates/Plato
<b>Justice is the interest of the stronger</b> <b>It "is might is right", a man ought to do what he can do, and deserve what he can get.</b> <b>Further, political authority is based on selfish interest of the ruler and bids men to obey the 'will' of a ruler who wills his own good.</b>	It is full of selfishness and presenting the case of ethical nihilism by sacrificing the welfare of the people at the will of the tyrant.
<b>Injustice is better than justice, as it brings wisdom, power and happiness</b>	Justice, in a real sense, is not the interest of the stronger that brings wisdom, strength and happiness arising out of one's knowledge and limitations; it is injustice that 'creates division and hatreds and fighting, while justice imparts harmony and friendship.

2. He refutes Pragmatism:

Glaucon	Socrates/Plato
<b>It is better to be unjust than to suffer injustice as all benefits rest with the former.</b> <b>In his view, justice is the will of the strongest when directed towards his own interests.</b> <b>It is based on fear, it is the child of fear-'a mean or compromise between the best of all, which is to do injustice and not be punished, and the worst of all, which is to suffer injustice without the power of retaliation.</b>	Justice assumes an artificial or a conventional character here. Plato applies the logic of his argument to counter that, in real sense; justice is nothing but a natural, internal and right condition of human life.

Plato refuted the above arguments by the same logic of describing justice as an indwelling quality of human soul that is not all to be taken as an artificial or a controversial object grounded in the selfish interest of the individual or the state. Justice, according to Plato, is something objective; it has its place in the soul and, as such, it is something natural commanding a man for having and doing what is one's own. To Plato, the individual is but part of a social order in which he is intended to fill up an appointed place instead of pursuing the pleasures of an isolated and self-seeking life. The life of individual is, for this reason, dominated by the fundamental consideration of public duty.

Viewed in this context, justice demands uniform and correct regulation of both inward and outward aspects of human personality. In a real sense, it seeks to establish strict oneness between the life of action and that of contemplation. The full realisation of the principle of justice requires that the outward expression of human personality (that appear in the form of action) must mirror forth the image of the inward mode of thought, or the being unjust of one will render the whole as unjust.

*Keeping this in view, Nettleship observes: "Real justice means not the mere doing of one's own business as in an expression of a corresponding mode of action within the soul; if the outward action is really just, it means that the soul is just within, that like a just state the whole soul and the several parts of it perform their proper functions in relation to one another"*

It may be inferred that justice has both individual and social aspects. While it asks the individual to assume only that office to which his nature is best suited, it is also required that the society must assign the office to him that is in conformity with his natural aptitude.

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