

Q2: Discuss in detail the Plato's concept of justice? (C.S.S 2022)

Ans

1) Introduction:

Plato, being an idealist thinker, wanted to establish an ideal state in Athens. He gave the concept of his ideal state in his book 'The Republic', which is still considered the one of the greatest works in western political thought. The very first part of this book is about Plato's concept of justice. Justice is the central idea of his book. Before telling his idea of justice, he goes on to repudiate the already existing theories about justice. After rejecting these theories, he goes on to say that justice takes place on two levels: individual level and at the level of society. In his theory of justice, he also gave the concept of 'state is individual writ large'. In short, he meant that the quality of a state depends upon the quality of its citizens.

2) Concepts of justice before Plato:

Although they might not be as famous, the concepts about justice used to exist before Plato's. He used them as a bedrock of his concept of justice, but by rejecting them. These concepts were given by Cephalus, Thrasymachus, and Glaucon.

i) Cephalus' concept of justice:

According to Cephalus, justice is 'paying what is due to one'. He was of the view that one should pay what one is owed. However, Plato rejected him by saying that what if one borrows a knife from one's friend and after some time, one's friend is inclined to harm someone with that knife. Should one return the knife one's mad friend?

ii) Thrasymachus' concept of justice:

According to Thrasymachus, justice is nothing more than the 'interest of the stronger'. The law is just an expression of power. Plato says if a segment of society is oppressed, it can't be called as just. Justice is when all the segments of society are given equal opportunities to prosper.

iii) Glaucon's idea of justice:

Glaucon's idea of justice is completely opposite to the one by Thrasymachus. He says that the justice is 'prosperity of weak'. However, by declaring it as an idea of inequality, Plato rejected this concept as well.

3) Plato's concept of justice:

According to Plato, a society is just if it manages to establish justice at two levels: at the level of individual and society at large.

i) Justice at individual level:

Plato classifies individuals in three categories: Men of Gold, Silver and Copper. According to Plato, men are generally divided into three categories owing to their characteristics. Three characteristics that differentiate people are Reason, courage and appetite. Men usually possess only one of them. According to him, justice at individual level means allowing people to identify and trace their dominant trait and choose they should be allowed to choose profession as per their dominant traits. If a man's dominant trait is reason, he should be made a part of decision-making. Similarly, if a man is courageous, he should be allowed to become a soldier. Furthermore, a man should be a trader if his dominant trait is appetite. These traits should be the guiding principle of every man's professional life.

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Men of	Dominant trait	Social class	Work done
Gold	Reason	Ruler	Rule or make laws
Silver	Courage	Soldier	Ensure security
Copper	Appetite	Trader	Trade and produce

According to Plato, assigning people with their professions in accordance with their dominant trait is going to bring harmony in society. People with courage should be required to ensure the security of 'the Republic'. ~~On the other~~ On the other hand, people with a lust for money should be asked to trade and produce. However, people who are rational should be the rulers of the republic.

ii) Justice at the level of society:

The main idea behind this concept is of non-interference. Each class should perform its duties according to its dominant characteristics. No class would be allowed to interfere in the duties of the other class. However, he emphasises that every class should be able to co-operate to other classes. Instead of directly interfering in the functions of other classes, they should readily respond to each other's call for help. Platonic concept of justice is not of legal nature, but it is of moral nature. According to him, every man should practice virtue, which keeps every man within his limits.

It is ideal to allow people to act within their nature because human nature inherently demands peace, prosperity and cooperation. Plato says that no one wishes to commit crime but the ~~society~~ injustice in society cause them to commit crimes. Injustice prevails when men having ~~nature's~~ appetite as a dominant trait rules over the people of courage and reason. In short, justice is putting people in their right place after judging their dominant traits.

4) State is individual writ large:

The term means the state is bigger version of the individual. Plato puts it as "like man, like state." So, the nature of state will depend on characters of individuals. If individuals are just, as said above, the state will be just. In order for the individuals to be just, the state would have to ensure that every ^{Person} performs his duties and not interfere in other men's duties. For Plato, principles governing life of individual (ethics) and principles governing state (policies) cannot be different from each other.

5) Critical Analysis:

1) Justice should not be a moral concept, as Plato's version of justice. However, it should be a legal concept. State should be able to take measures to establish a just society.

2) People should be allowed to observe their personalities. They should not be forced to do one job or duty for the rest of their lives. They should ~~have~~ possess an option to change their professions.

3) His whole concept of ideal state revolves around ~~the~~ a powerful philosopher king. This theory amplifies that wish of Plato.

4) Division of society in classes can cause class wars. A society should be allowed to ~~run~~ take its course.

5) His theories mostly focus on the development of individuals. In contrast, they should have guided the world about the development of a state.

6) Conclusion:

Platonic justice is not a legal concept. It is mostly a concept of moral virtue. It develops a society becomes just when people take upon their duties sincerely and not interfere in other people's duties. The duties or professions should be allocated to people by judging their traits.