

Q - Critically examine the concept of 'Justice' by Plato.

Introduction :

Plato was born in 427 B.C in an aristocratic Athenian family. Plato gave an philosophy in response to certain events which happened in Greece during those days. Plato grew in a city at war it was the time of Peloponnesian war in Greece. The war lasted for about 28 years, and resulted in the fall of Athens in the hands of Sparta. After the defeat of Athens the oligarchic rule of thirty was set up which lasted for 8 months and turned out to be very tyrannical. Plato was also disheartened by the unjust death of his teacher Socrates. ~~at the~~ These events proved of a far-reaching importance on Plato's mind. The economic and moral instability of Athens led Plato to write his political philosophy which was solely aimed at having a better political and social system in Athens.

The Republic :

Plato wrote several books on the situation of prevailing crisis of Athens and what system can protect them. The Republic was his famous treatise in which he advocated a just society and justice as a whole. In his work Plato wrote about the concept of 'Justice' which is the most important principle of Plato's philosophy. Plato saw in justice the only practical remedy of saving his beloved Athens from decay and ruin. He discovers and locates the principles of justice with the help of his ideal state.

Cardinal Virtues of Ideal State :- An ideal state for Plato possessed the four cardinal virtues of wisdom, courage, discipline and justice.

Discipline / Temperance : Befitting the trader or producer class whose dominant trait is Appetite or Desire. Self-discipline is necessary for the harmony of the state.

Courage : Befitting the trader or producer class, whose dominant trait is knowledge.

Courage : Courage is deciding how to act in trying times. The resilience in the face of adversity.

Wisdom : Knowing what's good and bad. Taking logical decisions based on the experience.

Discipline : Not living a life of excess. Having control over the impulses and emotions.

Justice : The act of doing what is right and just. Justice is doing one's job for which one was naturally fitted without interfering with others.

Plato's theory of Justice :

For Plato, the state was ideal, of which justice was the reality. Justice was the principle on which the state had to be founded and a contribution made towards the excellence of the city. Justice is a moral concept of Plato. As Prof: Ernest Barker has rightly pointed out:

"Justice for Plato is at once a part of human virtue and the bond which joins men together in a state - the state. It makes man good and makes him social"

The Republic of Plato was written in the form of a dialogue. In the so which he deduced the definition of Justice in his own way. He presented four characters in his book. These were Cephalus, Polemarchus (his son), Thrasymachus and Glaucon. He inquires from all his characters that what is Justice? Upon which each presented his own views regarding Justice.

Cephalus said, "Speaking the truth & paying ^{ones} debt."

Polemarchus said, "helping one's friends and harming one's enemies."

Plato rejects their definitions. He says it is difficult to distinguish one's true friends from enemies because appearances are often deceptive and it is immoral and unjust to harm someone without proper inquiry.

Thrasymachus said, "will of the strongest is justice".

Glaucon said, "Justice is artificial and conventional.

It is child of fear. It is good to be unjust but bad to suffer injustice."

Plato rejects Thrasymachus definition of Justice on the basis that it leads to 'Might is Right' which can be applied in the presents not in a human society. Plato also rejects Glaucon's definition, he says justice is something eternal internal. It relates to the soul and resides in the heart of individual and the state. Plato nullified all their views and narrated his definition of Justice as:

"Giving everyone his due".

He explained that justice actually was the name of giving every person his due whether he is rich or poor. A just state, Plato argues, protects the weaker and against the stronger. By 'Due' he meant rights and duties that individuals have towards the society. In a just state or society, the rulers and military, the producers all do what they ought to do.

Division of Labour :

Plato classified the whole society into three classes based on his idea of Justice. According to him, human behaviour flows from three sources and these are present in all human beings but at a different degrees.

- Emotions or Passion (Spirit)
- Desire (Appetite)
- Knowledge (Reason)

Plato divides the masses on the basis of these three traits :

i. Trader Class : Some people who have more dominance of desire in them are attracted towards material goods and productive activities. Such people are fit for trade.

ii. Soldier Class : Some people are driven by the emotions and spirit and attracted towards honour, pride and power. They are fit to work as soldiers and warriors.

iii. Philosopher Class : Some people desire knowledge and reason and are not attracted towards either wealth or power. They seek the wisdom and truth above anything. Such people should be given leadership roles and be trained to become philosopher kings.

Justice in the state means that there should be three classes in the state on functional basis. These should be proper relationship among them. They should perform their allotted duties and should not interfere in the affairs of one another. Thus justice means; the will to concentrate on one's own spheres of duty and not to meddle with the spheres of others.

Justice was "one class, one society, one man, one work."

Conclusion:

Platonic theory of Justice divides the state into three different classes hence, it is not applicable to modern states with larger population and numerous interests of and sections of society. His division of society into separate classes would lead to class consciousness and privileges. Therefore, it will create injustice rather than justice in the state.