

# Plato's Concept of Justice:

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# Introduction:

- ▶ Plato gave great importance to the concept of Justice.
  - ▶ It is evident from the fact that he sub-titled his book Republic “As concerning Justice”.
  - ▶ The fundamental issue in the “Republic”(Ideal State) is the discovery of the nature and habitation of justice.
  - ▶ To the Greeks, the term justice carried wider implications.
  - ▶ Before defining his conception of justice he discussed and rejected the existing versions & theories of justice .
  - ▶ Thus justice is the central theme of Plato’s Republic & the very foundation of his “Ideal State”.
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# Meaning of Justice:

- ▶ Plato criticized the conventional theories of justice and presented his own theory of justice.
  - ▶ Individually speaking justice is a human virtue that makes a person self-consistent and good.
  - ▶ Socially, justice is a social consciousness that makes a society internally harmonious and good.
  - ▶ His concept of justice cannot be identified with the legal justice.
  - ▶ His concept of justice is ethical and political.
  - ▶ It may refer to the individual virtue or the order of the society.
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# Meaning ...

- ▶ Greek word 'Dikaisine' (justice) is very closer in meaning to morality or righteousness and it includes within it the whole duty of man.
- ▶ It also covers the whole conduct of an individual which affects others.
- ▶ Plato contended that justice is the quality of the soul and virtue of man.
- ▶ It implies that a person should do only one function that is best suited to his natural aptitude without meddling with the domain of others.
- ▶ E. g. a ruler is just, if he rules wisely, a soldier is just if he shows chivalry in the war, etc.

# Principles/features of Justice:

- ▶ Most important principles /features of Plato's theory of justice are as follows –
    1. Functional Specialization,
    2. Justice as non-interference,
    3. Justice is virtue and goodness,
    4. Three elements of human nature corresponding to classes &
    5. System of education to realize Justice.
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# 1. Functional Specialization:

- ▶ This is the most important principle of his concept of justice.
  - ▶ Plato compared the state with the human body.
  - ▶ Like the human body is divided into 3 distinct parts – like head, stomach and hands & feet, the population of the state is divided into 3 parts namely philosophers, soldiers and peasant and workers.
  - ▶ If each one does its specified job the state will become ideal.
  - ▶ If any one of them encroaches on the other and interferes in others job, causes imbalance in the state, the state shall fall sick and ultimately dies.
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## 2. Justice as non-interference:

- ▶ Justice according to Plato is non-interference with the duties of another but to do his duty in the appointed place.
  - ▶ It says that one man should practice one thing that which to his nature was best suited to.
  - ▶ Non-interference is the key to promote harmonious relationship among the people without which a society disintegrates.
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# 3. Justice is virtue & goodness:

- ▶ Just as health is important to the body so also justice to the social order which means that justice is a virtue which can attain goodness.
  - ▶ It is a bond that joins men together in a society.
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## 4. Three elements of Human Nature corresponding to classes:

- ▶ Like, philosophers representing reason,
  - ▶ Warriors representing the spirit, &
  - ▶ Artisans representing appetite.
  - ▶ There are two forms of justice – like Individual & Social.
  - ▶ Individually justice is a human virtue, that makes man self consistent and good.
  - ▶ Socially justice is a self-consciousness that makes a society internally harmonious and good.
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# 5. System of Education to realize Justice:

- ▶ His concept of justice requires the system of education to include the programme of training of the guardians and philosopher kings to rule the state efficiently.
  - ▶ His scheme of education is not uniform for all but different for different people as they have to perform different functions.
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# Evaluation of Plato's concept of Justice:

- ▶ Important short-comings of his theory of justice may be listed as follows –
    1. Concept of harmony illusory,
    2. The concept of justice is undemocratic and totalitarian,
    3. A static theory,
    4. It does not explain why justice is necessary, etc.
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# 1. Concept of Harmony illusory:

- ▶ To Plato, if there is no harmony in the state, then there will be no justice and the unity of the state will be endangered.
  - ▶ But his method of attaining harmony may actually only create the image of harmony.
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## 2. The concept of justice is undemocratic & totalitarian:

- ▶ It is undemocratic as it does not treat all individuals as equal – everyone should have an equal say in the government.
  - ▶ But Plato delegates all powers at the hands of the philosopher king and not to the general population.
  - ▶ As it gives all powers in the philosopher king, he may assume all powers & become all-in-all(totalitarian).
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# 3. A Static Theory:

- ▶ As there is no scope for movement, everyone is condemned to live at a particular station throughout his life.

## 4. It does not explain why justice is necessary?

- ▶ It does not convince us as to why it is better to be just or why the just person is happier than others.

# Plato's Conception of Philosopher King:

- ▶ The conception of rule by the philosopher king is the most profoundly the original conception in the entire political thought of Plato.(Prof. Foster.)
  - ▶ In Plato's Ideal State supreme position is given to philosopher who alone can become king.
  - ▶ The main cause for all the turmoil was due to the rule of ignorant over the wise.
  - ▶ Plato held that only competent and efficient people should have the right to govern and rulers should not be selected by lottery.
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# Functions of Philosopher King:

- ▶ His main function is to maintain the integrity of the ideal state.
  - ▶ In order to do so, he was required to perform four important functions, they are –
    1. He has **to maintain justice**, so that the three social classes remain in order. The membership of each class is given to a child according to the best element of his personality – reason, spirit & appetite.
    2. He has **to maintain the system of education** and training meant for the upper two social classes.
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# Functions .....

3. He has to maintain the size of the population of the state.
  4. He has to keep his control over the economic class so that there is no abundance of wealth in the hands of any person. In order to do so, he may have to make a law.
- In order to carry on these functions a philosopher king should be a statesman with broadest knowledge.

# Qualities of a Philosopher King:

1. He should be the lover of truth,
  2. He should be realistic in his approach & dealings,
  3. He should have self-control so that he is free of self-interest,
  4. He should be bold and courageous and free of self-interest,
  5. He should be kind, passionate & courteous to his subjects,
  6. Above all, he should be a man of learning and wisdom.
- ▶ Above qualities of the philosopher king indicates that Plato's philosopher king has to be a person of great virtue, wisdom and knowledge.

# Philosopher king – free of family & property:

- ▶ He is subjected to a life of strict discipline and sacrifice.
  - ▶ They live in seclusion and in barracks to protect them from all kinds of corrupting influences.
  - ▶ They are deprived of personal wealth, family & pleasures.
  - ▶ Plato advocated that he should not have his home or private property or children of their own.
  - ▶ All these restrictions are necessary for him to serve the state with the spirit of dedication & devotion.
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# Philosophers are trained Statesmen:

- ▶ In Plato's ideal state education and training is a must for becoming philosopher king.
  - ▶ From 30 – 35 years philosophers are taught metaphysics and statesmanship up to 50 years.
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# Absolute sovereign power to rule:

- ▶ He has given absolute sovereign power to rule as he is the embodiment of virtue and knowledge.
- ▶ There is no need of public control over him or over his actions. And he is above law.

# Criticisms:

1. **Despotism of Philosopher King:** He monopolises all powers in his hands which may lead to dictatorship.
  - People cannot remove him.
2. **Philosophy alone is not wisdom:** His system of education to the philosopher king ignores education in law, literature, etc. Only philosophic nature is tested which is not correct.
  - A ruler requires the knowledge of everything including economics which is not given to the ruler.

# Criticisms .....

3. Not practical: It is difficult to get a philosopher king who has the qualifications as specified by Plato.
  - ▶ It sounds theoretically very good but it is practically not possible to produce such a ruler.
  - ▶ In that case, should the state remain without a ruler.

# Criticisms .....

4. Family and property are not a hindrance to good governance: Possession of family and property makes the ruler selfish.
  - ▶ Therefore, according to Plato, he should be free of family and property.
  - ▶ Good governance requires so many factors but Plato ignores such factors.

## 5. No clarity regarding the selection of the Philosopher King:

- ▶ How philosophers becomes kings that Plato has not clarified.
  - ▶ If many philosophers have equal capability who should decide to become a king?
  - ▶ Whether philosopher king gets selected by himself or through other philosophers is not mentioned.
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## 6. Plato's philosopher king is above law:

- ▶ Since philosophers are virtuous and good, they are supreme and above law.
- ▶ This went against the Greek conviction for individual freedom and self-government.

# Plato on Communism:

- ▶ Communism is one of the pre-requisite of his ideal state.
  - ▶ Plato had no confidence in human beings.
  - ▶ He provided for communism to prevent human temptations.
  - ▶ Communism is a system of social organization in which women and property are held in common.
  - ▶ Plato in his “Republic” outlined a society with communal holding of property and wives.
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# Meaning:

- ▶ Plato's communism is meant for the ruling class and the warriors class only and not for the vast majority namely the working class.
  - ▶ To him, it is a new social order in which the ruling class gave up private property and family life for the sake of dedicating themselves to maintain unity, harmony, security and freedom within the state.
  - ▶ To him, minimising social inequality would promote civil peace & good government.
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# Plato's reasoning for communism:

- ▶ His theory of communism is an external remedy to cure the temptations of guardians & auxiliary guardians.
- ▶ He was aware of the concept of power corrupts & absolute power corrupts absolutely.
- ▶ Plato had no trust in the human nature and thought of family and property as the corrupting influences to the ideal state.
- ▶ By providing for communism of property & wives Plato wanted to render guardian positions undesirable to the commoners(as there is no room for obtaining greater goods and pleasures).

# Communism of Property:

- ▶ According to Plato, there are two forms of communism – communism of property & communism of wives and children.
  - ▶ Possession of private property rights would give rise to selfish considerations and deviate the attention of the guardian class from public service.
  - ▶ Communism of property means deprivation of property rights to the two guardian classes – ruling class & soldier classes.
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# Communism of property .....

- ▶ To cure the greed out of the rulers there is no way short of denying them the right to cull anything of their own (Sabine).
  - ▶ He insisted that the rulers should live in barracks and have meals at common tables.
  - ▶ The common class should pay for their livelihood.
  - ▶ If they possess private property they are bound to undermine the value of virtue which is the most important ingredient of the ruling class.
  - ▶ Plato's communism meant only for the guardian classes and expect them to renunciation of property & family for the good of the society.
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# Criticisms:

1. Renunciation of property rights is against to the basic human nature. Because, acquisition or possession or ownership is a natural instinct of man.
  2. Any scheme which excludes majority of members of the society could be a failure.
  3. Abolition of private property destroys the sentiments of charity & benevolence.
  4. Property of all is the property of none – results in loss of production.
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# Criticisms ....

5. It leads to over centralization & subordinates the individual to the state.
  6. Plato's scheme of communism is totally silent about the slaves which formed the bulk of the population in Greece.
  7. Plato's communism promotes dead uniformity in states but proper uniformity can be promoted through a system of education.
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# Communism of Wives and Children:

- ▶ Abolition of private property without the abolition of family would result in the failure of his scheme of an ideal state.
  - ▶ Because, man always gives priority to the interest of his family and children over the broader interest of the nation.
  - ▶ The institution of family is the root of all selfishness – may lead to civic sedition.
  - ▶ According to Plato family and property are interdependent and the abolition of one without the other is meaningless.
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# Reasons for communism of wives:

- ▶ Following are the important justifications for it –
    1. To create unity in the state,
    2. To emancipate women, &
    3. For realizing a better and more intelligent race(Eugenic).
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# Its basic Principles/features:

1. It is meant for guardian class only,
  2. Emancipate women from the drudgery of home – to give equal participation in the public affairs,
  3. No system of permanent marriage,
  4. All guardians live together in common barracks,
  5. Temporary mating between the best men and women of a particular age group to produce a more intelligent race(Eugenics).
  6. Responsibility for rearing children was to be entrusted to the state nurses,
  7. Common ownership of women by the guardian class.
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# Criticisms:

1. **Plato does not see any difference between family and the state**(organic conception).  
Whereas the family is a unity but the state is a plurality. State is not a enlarged version of the family.
2. **Communism of wives leads to social disharmony** – causes much harm to the community – as one female cannot be the wife of all guardians.

# Criticisms ....

3. **Children will not get the care and nourishment which is possible in a family.** This causes psychological imbalances in the child which will do more harm than good to the community in future.
4. **Plato virtually reduced the human beings to the position of a prize-stock animals for the realization of a supposed good.**
5. **State controlled mating is unworkable.**
6. **Marriage is not a mechanical but a social institution. Family is not merely a mating agency but has certain higher & nobler aims. Hence, he has degraded the institution of marriage and family.**

# Criticisms ....

7. Plato does **not differentiated between man and woman**. But in reality there are differences of physical structure, character & intelligence. Women are gentle, sensitive & merciful but men are energetic, strong and intelligent.
  8. The concept of **temporary marriages** are **neither logical nor desirable**.
  9. **Abolition of family** gives **serious set back to sentiments like love, charity, generosity, mercy, etc.**
  10. Plato by assigning a active role to women in politics **makes them neglect family life**. It is difficult to have a happy state without happy families.
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# Conclusion:

- ▶ Plato may be logical in emphasizing that the state could not get undivided loyalty unless the institution of family is abolished.
  - ▶ But this is a unrealistic theory – as abolition of family is contrary to all notions of human psychology – its abolition is unjustified.
  - ▶ Marriage & family are age old social, religious & ethical institution which cannot be abolished.
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