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A CRITICAL EXPOSITION OF PLATO'S PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATIONS IN ENSURING JUSTICE

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Abstract

This article descends into Plato's representation of justice in *The Republic*, focusing on exploring a notion that has been fundamental to society since its inception. While justice was formed to ensure equality within a stratified society, it frequently results in inequity for particular sectors of society. This paradoxical element of justice makes it biased and sometimes fictitious for some groups of people. An unfortunate consequence of pursuing justice is that specific segments of society are regularly deprived. Therefore, this article discusses the essence of social stratification in Plato's concept of justice and how far this stratification does justice for each class.

Keywords: *Justice, Division of Soul, Division of citizen, Social Stratification.*

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Introduction

Plato, an eminent philosopher in the history of philosophy, left an indelible mark on the foundational structure of philosophical thought. As a disciple of the renowned Socrates, his mentor profoundly shaped his ideologies, though he diverged from him in various respects. Growing up in Athens, he was influenced by the political climate of that time, which instilled in him a fervent desire for a just and stable society. His works, *The Republic* and *The Statesman*, can be seen as manifestations of this dream. The classical concept of justice can be found in Plato's philosophy. Whether the idea of justice arose before the establishment of society or not, there is controversy regarding that. The very concept of justice means ensuring equal rights for all. Therefore, it means having an equal attitude or being right. Justice in the broader sense is closer to the term fairness. (Edwards, 1967, pp. 298-299) Justice is the fundamental tenet of society under which society is established. American Philosopher John Rawls defines justice as the cooperation between the equal and the free. (Rawls, 1985,p.231) The concept of social justice differs from society to society as it is a relative concept, and the principle under society regulated varies from society. However, the common feature of justice is the same: the focus of justice is to ensure equality and fairness for all. At some point, inequality can also become the principle of justice, as we found in the philosophy of Aristotle, where he emphasizes that equal should be treated equally and the unequal should be treated unequally. (Aristotle, 1916, p. 117) Every society has a stratification under which a state is circulated. From the very ancient age, society has been strategized in this way. Social stratification

usually means dividing wealth, work, or property in society. According to Melvin M. Tumin, "Social stratification refers to the "arrangement of any social group or society into hierarchy of unequal positions about power, property, social evaluation, and psychic gratification." "(Rao,2012,p.283). Social stratification has been a recurring theme throughout the annals of human society. This stratification, known by different names, is a societal contract that shapes our lives. It prompts us to question its justification and the controversies it stirs. Every society has a social class or stratification, dictating the division of assigned duties. The crucial question, however, is whether this stratification fosters equality or merely justifies the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities among the citizens of a state. Plato's concept of justice is a classic example of how stratification can be the formula of the just state. This paper has shown the shortcomings of the arguments against conventional justice and his theory of justice. Then, it has shown how social stratification hinders ensuring the state's justice by giving particular sections special privileges.

Understanding Plato's Concept of Justice

Before discussing the concept of justice, Plato refuted the traditional views of justice, including those of Thrasymachus and Polymarchus. He wanted to prove that the conventional way of justice is one-sided; in other words, it is not enough. He challenges traditional views of justice and presents his concept through dialogues and arguments. Plato uses Socrates to present his views in *The Republic*. He engages Socrates and various interlocutors to question the inconsistencies and ambiguities in the traditional notions of justice.

Traditional notions of justice

Thrasymachus' Perspective

Thrasymachus argues that justice is the advantage of the stronger. He suggests that those in power define justice from of which is based on their interests. In support of his argument, Thrasymachus showed that in every political system, all forms of government, whether it is democracy or tyranny, enact laws that might work to preserve their self-interest. It can be compared to the teleological theory of ethics, which emphasizes the result of an action rather than the intention. (Lille,1986,p.101) In this course of justice, how justice is enacted and the rightness or the wrongness of that way is not essential. What is important is whether the justice system can favor the strongest section of society or not. That means, in the views of Thrasymachus, justice depends upon the interest of the strongest. Plato critiques the notion that leadership is solely driven by self-interest, emphasizing that a true leader's actions aim to improve society. Plato draws parallels between leadership and other domains, notably art and medical service, to elucidate his perspective. Plato's argument becomes more vivid when he likens leadership to the practice of medicine. He contends that medicine's success is measured by its ability to facilitate healing, just as a doctor's effectiveness is measured by its capacity to aid the patient's recovery. In this context, Plato underscores the idea that no independent interest in the doctor or the medicine other than the doctor's commitment to healing the patient.

By making this analogy, Plato underscores that a genuine ruler, like a dedicated doctor, aims to advance the subjects' welfare. Plato (375 C.E./2013) challenges the perception that leaders are primarily motivated by self-interest and highlights their ethical

and moral responsibility in promoting the well-being of the society they govern. (p.23)

As Socrates says,

And, therefore, my dear Thrasymachus, I conclude, no ruler of any kind, qua ruler, exercises his authority, whatever its sphere, with his interest in view, but that of the subject of his skill. It is his subject and his subject's proper interest to which he looks in all he says and does. (Plato, 375 C.E./2013, p.24).

The art of being successful is in the contentment of the subject. If the ruler does something forgetting the subject's interest, eventually, that will hurt the ruler's reputation. A ruler implements a law even if it contradicts the ruler's interests. Plato challenges this by questioning whether rulers are always right in determining what is truly just and advantageous. Often, rulers regulate laws that might harm the rulers or that might not work in the ruler's interest. (Plato, 375 C.E./2013, pp. 25-39) So, by showing multiple arguments, Plato indicates that justice cannot be the principle that focuses on the interests of the strongest.

Polemarchus' view: Justice is giving back everyone's due.

In defining this conventional view, Polemarchus focuses on the view that justice is telling the truth and giving back everyone's due, more elaborately, giving back the same treatment received from the opponent: good treatment to friends and hostile treatment to enemies. This form of justice has similarities with the distributive concept of justice. In refutation, Plato has argued that a just person cannot do injustice to others, not even to their enemies, as it is wholly opposed to his very nature; on this ground, Plato has refuted this view. To elaborate on his points, Plato also emphasizes that giving back one's due is not justice,

as one shall not give back the weapon to the person who has gone mad. Therefore, Socrates says,

... if one borrowed a weapon from a friend who subsequently went out of his mind and then asked for it back, surely it would be generally agreed that one ought not to return it, and it would not be right to do so, nor to consent to tell the strict truth to a madman? (Plato, 375 C.E./2013, p.7)

He also compares enemies to horses. Likewise, it is not wise to provoke one's enemies, which might worsen the situation even more. Therefore, using this mentality to harm others or behaving in a hostile manner can never bring positive results. However, it can exacerbate the problem and cause the person even more problems.

Plato's Concept of Justice

Plato examines his theory of justice from two perspectives: Justice in the individual and justice in the state.

Justice in the Individual

Plato believed that justice is a quality of societies and individuals. That means a person must deal with internal fights within himself to balance the qualities of the soul. He argued that a just individual is one in which the three parts of the soul—reason, spirit, and appetite—are in harmony. Reason should rule over spirit and passion, with each part performing correctly. In this balanced state, a person acts justly and lives virtuously.

Justice, therefore, is a principle of this kind; its real concern is not with external actions, but with a man's inward self, genuine concern and interest. The just man will not allow the three elements that make up his inward self to trespass on

each other's functions or interfere with each other. (Plato, 375 C.E./2013, p.152)

Later, followed by Plato, Aristotle also divided the tripartite division of the soul in his book *de Anima*.

Justice in the state

Plato supports a class-based social structure, categorizing society into three classes: producers or workers, auxiliaries, and guardians. As individuals, one must strive to maintain a harmonious balance among the qualities of one's soul. In other words, one must balance appetite, spirit, and rationality to become virtuous. When maintaining a particular assigned role in society, this well-balanced human being also belongs to the different at those points, and justice can be established.

Guardian Class

Both man and woman can belong to the guardian class by possessing the qualities of physical strength, courage, a philosophical temperate, and a holder of high spirits. Plato is looking for a watchdog in the guise of the guardian class who will recognize his foe or friend. Machiavelli sought these qualities in his *The Prince*, where he emphasized that a ruler should be cunning like a fox and brave like a lion to recognize the traps and fight against the enemies. (Machiavelli, 1903, pp-69-70). The main qualities that separated the guardian class from the other classes were the abundance of courage and wisdom. The guardian class will be devoid of private family and property to prevent biased attitudes. The philosopher king is selected from this class.

Producers

The qualities that a producer, indicating artisan and farmer, is abundant in are the appetitive soul, distinguishing them from the rest of the classes and making them great producers. The main focus of this class is to produce enough food and crops for the state, and the abundance of appetitive souls within them will force them to work harder.

Auxiliaries

This class is more courageous than others. It is also known as the soldier class. The main focus of this class is to protect the sovereignty of the state through courage.

Here, the concept of social justice depends on the role of the individual. The rulers (philosopher-kings) govern with wisdom, the warriors protect the state with courage, and the producers (artisans and farmers) contribute to the state's economic well-being. Each class should stick to its role, and this division of labor ensures the harmony and stability of the state. Plato's perspective shares similarities with the functionalist aspects of socialist theory. The functionalist theory states that every person has some role in running a society smoothly in every society. In both cases, an analogy is drawn between the human body and society to emphasize the need for balance and cooperation to ensure smooth functioning.

Philosopher King

As a supporter of the system of oligarchy in forms of governments and a hater of the democratic government system, Plato supported the aristocratic system where the ruler of the state would be known under the name Philosopher King. The source

of being the king and the position holder is Knowledge. Plato is not gender biased; according to him, both men and female can hold this position, as both have the capability. (Plato, 375 C.E./2013, p.162) The king will be selected from the guardian class. Just to not be neutral and not be biased, Plato proposed no personal family and private property for the philosopher king.

Problems in Plato's arguments against conventional justice and of Plato's Concept of Justice

Plato has shown that a just person is a happy person by maintaining the balance of the qualities of his soul, while an unjust person is unhappier. As a just person, he will refrain from immoral activities such as lying, cheating, and other immoral activities. Arrington (1998) raises questions over the idea, that a just happy person who is a happy person refrains from immoral activities. According to him, Plato made an ignorito *elenchi* fallacy by drawing irrelevant conclusions. Plato must have proved that health yields justice but he cannot prove that. Plato stated that keeping the balance of the soul is the prerequisite to being healthy, so he will not engage in immoral activities but Arrington shows that even a healthy person can quickly be involved in immoral activities.(pp.57-58)

Plato has rejected the theory that giving everyone's due can be the definition of justice; by doing so, he has ultimately rejected the distributive sectors of justice, the argument by which he has shown that giving back one due cannot be the principle of justice is not strong enough.

He has also shown in his argument that justice cannot be the interest of the strongest. However, at some point, ensuring justice and the matter of justice can favor a particular group of

people, as shown in this paper's latter section of the argument. Another significant challenge in the pursuit of justice relates to the individual's ability to balance the tripartite division of the soul, as proposed by some philosophical perspectives. This division typically comprises reason, spirit, and appetite, each pulling the individual in different directions, making it challenging to consistently act justly. The innate selfishness or self-centeredness, frequently regarded as a natural component of human nature, complicates maintaining the balance between the three divisions. Humans tend to prioritize their interests, making it challenging to act in an altruistic or unselfish manner continuously. This self-centeredness impedes achieving faithful justice since it can drive individuals to make decisions that benefit them at the expense of others or the larger community. Individuals must battle with these inner tensions and attempt to balance their self-interest and commitment to the community, promising to ensure justice in society. Obtaining this balance is a complex and continuing process that requires moral development, self-awareness, and ethical decision-making.

Exposition of Social Stratification in the Philosophy of Plato

In Plato's argument against conventional morality, a vital issue he addresses is the refutation of the traditional morality represented by Thrasymachus's viewpoint that "might make right." Plato argues against this perspective in his *The Republic*, asserting that true justice is not merely a product of power and authority but should be grounded in moral principles and the common good. However, in defining justice, Plato somehow gives priority to this conventional way of justice. Plato was not a supporter of democracy as he thought that the rule run by democracy was not efficient. That is why he supported the

rule of the aristocrats. However, he claims that in his utopian forms of justice, by assigning different duties to different classes, he has somehow given priority to the power of wisdom, that of Knowledge, that of justice in his philosophy still is in favor of the specific class by allowing them to rule by them only. Not only that, but Plato also proposed a system in which certain qualities of children are born, which can be explained in modern medical science by eugenics. The moral or ethical grounds of this kind of behavior can be questioned. Eugenics is the scientific method to influence the birth process of unborn children, which is used to improve the quality of the population and is often sterilized to make sure specific lineage from the generation is never born (Galton, 1904, pp. 43-51). In Plato's breeding system, he does not sterilize anyone; he ensures the best quality person possible. This process of reproduction can be compared to the process of animal breeding. Through this process, the guardian class is privileged; in other words, specific classes have been privileged for decades, and they can rule the kingdom, as the philosopher king will be selected from the guardian class.

The children of other classes get deprived in this way. It can be said in the refutation that whatever Plato did for the welfare of the state but doing that will give the best person for the state, somehow that violates human rights. Even the definition he had given that the person who will try to violate this classification will surely do injustice to the state will never leave room for those poor to grow rich someday. Because of this, Melvin M. Tumin (Lewis, 1968) also does not support social stratification as he thinks it does not supply opportunities for underprivileged people to grow, flourish, or use their talent. (pp.103-104)

In *the Republic*, Plato condemned poets and poetry from the ideal state because he thought they spread rumors and misinformation in society. This kind of attitude towards specific communities is sheer racism. Many great thinkers have criticized Plato's condemnation of poets in *the Republic*. As Rucker (1966) says, "Neither the poets nor the critics have ever forgiven Plato for his censorship in *the Republic*." (p.167) Although Plato has indeed allowed women to be the state's ruler, he has demeaned women, claiming themselves to be inferior to men by intelligence. He also does not support the conventional system of marriage, because of which he has mentioned that children and women should be familiar to all to avoid disparity or bias. However, this kind of attitude needs to give women the proper respect a woman holds in conventional marriage. The political equality that Plato gave to women was only for the betterment of the state. As Taylor (2012) says, "At the extreme, he can be seen as arguing for the emancipation of women, simply as the best use, for the good of the state, of the resources provided by the (inferior) talents of women." (p. 84).

Even in modern times, the cost and other issues related to ensuring justice are what Plato's utopia needs to address fully, including the practicality and cost of implementing a just justice system. This concern has been raised and discussed by philosophers like Bertrand Russell, particularly in his work "*Power: A Social Analysis*." Russell delves into the concept of power, and when analyzing political systems, he supports democracy with specific corrections. He sees democracy as tempering the power of government or rulers. According to Russell (2004), ensuring justice is costly and challenging for the masses to ask for. That is why, Russell has suggested amendments to democracy to ensure justice for everyone. (pp.295-296)

Even the modern course of justice requires a deeper understanding of what justice is, which can hinder the pursuit of justice for certain sections of the people. In a democratic society, people may not be fully equipped to advocate for their rights or navigate complex legal systems. Moreover, the process of justice might also be affected by the opinion of the strongest, which means the process of justice gets surpassed by the opinion of the most vital section of society, which is superior to other classes by money, power, or social status.

Plato proposed a combination of three classes, assigning distinct roles to ensure justice in society. However, in doing so, he has somehow prioritized the ruling class over the two guardians or the working class. The lifestyle of these two are solely decided or controlled by the guardian class. Plato's concept of justice involves classifying individuals into diverse groups based on their innate qualities, particularly the quality of the soul. These groups include producers, guardians, and rulers. Each group has a predefined role and set of responsibilities. This classification implies a deterministic view of human nature, as it suggests that a person's role in society is figured out by their inherent qualities and cannot be easily changed. For example, if someone is classified as having a greater appetite, they are assigned to the producer class. They are expected to fulfill specific duties related to producing goods and services. However, in individuals with mixed qualities, such as having a significant appetite and wisdom, what class they will fit needs to be clarified in Plato's concept of justice. Plato's framework needs to address human nature's complexity and diversity adequately. It leaves room for questions about how individuals with overlapping or varied qualities would fit into

this rigid classification system. Thus, Plato's theory of justice overlooks individual agency and the potential for growth and change. Plato's system questions the fairness and flexibility of assigning societal roles based on such rigid categorizations. Being interested in something and possessing certain qualities are different things. For example, if x has some abundance in quality appetite, but he has also had some interest in joining the military, which is to say, being an average holder of courage appetite, he wants to be a soldier to join a soldier; according to Plato, that would be an injustice. However, every person has some potential to explore. Talent or quality is not rigid or innate but should be developed. In Plato's *Republic*, the ideal state he presents, which he believes to be the embodiment of justice, ultimately takes precedence over individual rights and freedoms. Not only that, but Plato also described the deterministic approach of the ruler in the education system. Plato implemented various measures, including prohibiting specific texts containing negative narratives that could harm children. However, it is crucial to consider the long-term implications of this approach, as it may inadvertently isolate children from the full spectrum of human emotions and experiences. Life is inherently a combination of positive and negative emotions, and by shielding children from the negative, they may become disconnected from the complexities of reality. Consequently, placing excessive emphasis on specific texts can be seen as an unwise decision, as it limits the exposure of young minds to the diversity of human experiences.

The state's rulers, philosopher-kings, have significant authority in making decisions for the good of society, which is an authoritarian element. This implies that the state has

considerable power to direct and regulate the lives of its citizens, even in matters that are typically considered personal or private.

Although Plato's concept of justice is a utopia, his classification is based on having distinct levels of quality in the soul, which has been found in the philosophy of Karl Marx and Max Weber, but their basis of stratification is different. Karl Marx declared in the *Communist Manifesto* that the whole history of human civilization is the history of class struggle and conflict. Marx mentioned that the society that came into this stage had five stages, and the process by which it developed its structure was based on the mode of production it had, as until the issue of having private property, there were no classes. In primitive societies, there were no classes or a slavery system. In capitalism, there are two classes: have or have not. In capitalist society, there are two classes. The proletariat named under Have Not and the bourgeois named under Have are deprived of the system of mode of production run by the bourgeois. In capitalist society, justice means getting the highest profit by getting their work done by the proletariat. There are some dialectic or contradictory relations between these two classes, but there is beauty in disparity, just like the platonic Concept of Justice. To run a society, they share a mutual relationship. Even in communism, Karl Marx never declared that the class system would be diminished. In every society, it is a reality that there will be class, but the main thing is how to reduce class disparities. In the philosophy of John Rawls, to establish an egalitarian society, he emphasized the well-being of the least advantaged people in ensuring justice for all, as he supported inequality as long as it benefited the least advantaged one. However, Rawls gave less importance to the higher advantage, and the middle class's interest

was ignored. The Stratifications are also found in the philosophy of German Sociologist Max Weber. Max Weber classified society into three classes based on three elements: money, power, and status. So, stratification is not new; it has always been a part of history, and most critical thinkers explain it as an integral part of society. However, the question is how far the stratification leaves room for the other classes to grow and flourish. Plato's endeavor in this theory of justice is to establish a just society where everyone is well-balanced; somehow, he has prioritized one class over others. So, for the stratification in ensuring justice he has made, he cannot be blamed for it.

Conclusion

Plato's concept of justice, though idealistic or utopian, invites us to think critically about its relevance to the real world. Justice is never absolute; it is introduced into societies to establish fairness and maintain order. However, the practical implementation of justice often introduces complexities and inequalities that raise fundamental questions about the justice system's effectiveness. Plato's depiction of a stratified justice system reflects the inherent stratification found within society itself. In observing human societies, it becomes apparent that they have historically operated with specific individuals or groups enjoying privileges and advantages over others. Plato aimed to create a framework that balanced the interests of individuals, fostering a society characterized by harmony and justice. In practice, achieving this envisioned balance proves challenging. Despite Plato's efforts to ensure equal treatment and opportunities for all members of society, particular classes or groups may receive preferential treatment, which introduces a discrepancy between the theoretical ideals of justice and the realities of societal structures.

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