

Plato and his thoughts

Greek political thought originates from Socrates. Plato was one of the most brilliant disciples of Socrates. Plato is considered the pioneer of Western Political thought today. It is because his mentor, Socrates, did not produce any writing, and we know of his thoughts only from the writings of Plato.

Plato, whose original name is Aristocles, was interested in pursuing philosophy and searching for the "truth". After the tragic death of Socrates, Plato produced various works on questions of State, Law, Justice, Politics and Philosophy. The Republic, in particular, is one of his most famous works. It deals with a wide range of ideas, and many of those ideas are relevant and are studied to date. Theory of Justice in Plato's Republic is worth studying for any political science student today.

Plato's Theory of Justice

Since the tradition of Greek Philosophy considered ethics to be important, they believed that the state comes into existence for the sake of life and continues for the sake of a good life. Plato believed in the same dictum and held that the state exists to fulfil the necessities of human life. The origin of the state, therefore, owed its existence to the fulfilment of human needs, and the Greek philosophers saw society and state as the same.

Unlike other living beings, human beings do not merely seek survival but essentially want to live a good life. Justice is the essential requirement to lead a good life. One cannot lead a good life without meeting their needs, and it's possible to meet one's needs only in the presence of Justice.

The Republic discusses Justice in the form of a dialogue. This methodology is known as Dialectical Method, which Plato borrowed from his mentor, Socrates. The dialogue takes place between Socrates, Glaucon, Adeimantus, Cephalus and Thrasymachus. The dialogue concluded that if one were allowed to suppress another, there would be complete anarchy, and it would be difficult to have any state of affairs. To save oneself from any such suffering and to prevent injustice, men enter into a contract to prevent injustice upon themselves or on others. That is also how laws came into existence to codify standard human conduct and bring a sense of Justice.

Essence of Justice

Socrates clarifies that justice is a relationship. A relationship among individuals relies on the kind of social organisation they inhabit. He further explains that justice can be analysed on a large scale, that is, state and then, on the level of the individual. Therefore, Plato's idea of justice believes that just individuals and just society are interwoven. To further understand Plato's theory of justice and its essence, it is important first to solve the issue of selecting the best ruler for the state. According to his argument, statesmanship is a special function and can only be performed by qualified persons with a moral character.

Then, in order to comprehend the nature of the state, the nature of man has to be understood too. Plato believed in "Like Man, Like State", implying that the character of the state is dependent on the character of its citizens. It also meant that once the nature of human beings is understood, it's easier to understand the functions of human society, and to arrive at the conclusion as to who is the best fit for ruling in this society.

Plato characterises human behaviour in three main sources:

Desire (or Appetite)