

Plato characterises human behaviour in three main sources:

Desire (or Appetite)

Emotion (or Spirit)

Knowledge (or Intellect)

Each human being has all three emotions but what varies is the degree to which these emotions are present in them. According to Plato, the ones who are restless and rapacious are fit for trade. Others who are driven by their emotion or spirit are best suited to become soldiers. Lastly, there are few who find no pleasure in worldly pursuits or victory and are satisfied in meditation. Such beings yearn to learn, and they are always in search of truth, and according to Plato, only these men of wisdom are fit to rule.

Plato thinks that just like the perfect individual is the one who has the ideal combination of desire, emotion and knowledge, a just state is the one that has individuals as its citizens for trade, to be soldiers and to rule. In the perfect state, individuals driven by desire will lead to growth and production but would not rule; the military armies would maintain security but not rule either. Only the individuals who have no appetite to gain material possession or power and are forces of knowledge would become the rulers.

Justice: the virtue of state

In his idea of justice, Plato identifies virtues that suit each social class.

The social class of traders, whose dominant trait is desire, the befitting virtue of traders is TEMPERANCE.

The social class of soldiers, whose dominant trait is spirit or emotion, the befitting virtue of soldiers is COURAGE.

The social class of Philosophers, whose dominant trait is knowledge or intellect, the befitting virtue of Philosophers, is WISDOM.

The virtue that befits the state is JUSTICE which creates harmony in all the three social classes and is a necessary condition for human happiness. The first three virtues belong to the respective three social classes, but the fourth virtue is a manifestation of harmony between all the three classes. These four virtues are also referred to as the four Cardinal Virtues of Plato's theory of Justice.

Philosopher-Kings: the cornerstone of Plato's theory of Justice

Plato is known for his unique concept of the philosopher-kings put forward in his political thought. He prescribed that the reins of government should remain with a very small class of philosopher-kings who represent REASON.

According to 'The story of Philosophy' by Will Durant, "the industrial forces would produce, but they would not rule, the military forces would protest, but they would not rule, the forces of knowledge and science and philosophy would be nourished and protected, and they would rule".

Conclusion

Plato's theory of Justice is famously known as the Architectonic Theory of Justice. He explains that as during the construction of a building, each part is assigned to different artisans, but the architect combines it to contribute to the final outlay of the building and add to its splendour. Similarly, the three cardinal virtues, namely Temperance, Courage, and Wisdom, would be cultivated by Traders, Soldiers and Philosopher class, respectively, and Justice, the fourth virtue, would act as the architect establishing a perfect state. Due to this inference between architecture and the organisation of society, his theory is also called the Architectonic Theory of Justice.

To conclude, Plato considers Justice to be a necessary condition of the

good life. It is conducive to human happiness. The Republic, his famous work, is the most important work that explains his idea of justice. His theory of justice, built on moral foundations, with a clarification of virtues and classification of social classes, is considered today as relevant for all ages.