

Different views of Aristotle and Plato on justice

Swastika Pandit, Former Student Of IGNOU

Abstract: Western political thought was started by two Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle. They formed the actual basis of western political philosophy. They gave an ample number of theories on different subjects. Justice is one of them. Plato's theory of justice always deals with the individual's duty with great excellence. On the other hand, Aristotle connects justice with legal aspects. According to him, justice is the reward that people would receive in terms of their performance. Though Aristotle was a disciple of Plato, he still rejected the whole idea of Plato's justice. Both of them presented their theories of justice in their own unique ways. In this paper, we will discuss their parts of justice in detail and try to analyze how far they are different from each other.

Keywords: Justice, Plato, Aristotle, Greek Philosophers, Duties, Rewards, Equality, Performance.

Introduction

Justice has always had an immense effect not only on political practice and theory but also on political philosophers. Justice was formed with the Latin word 'iungere', which means a bond. So we can explain justice as a bond that binds every person together and distributes his or her due share of rights, rewards, and even punishment. Plato and Aristotle, the two famous Greek political thinkers, discussed justice in their respective dialogues, Republic and Nicomachean Ethics, elaborately. For Plato, justice is one of the highest virtues. [1] Aristotle's justice is the absence of lawlessness. For him, "justice belongs to the polis, for justice is an order of the polis community." [2] So we can see that both Plato and Aristotle discussed their part of justice in two different ways. In this paper, we can discuss the theory of justice in detail, which was given by both of these greatest Greek philosophers, and we will also explain how both of their theories are different from each other.

Plato on Justice

Plato was born in Athens, and he was an aristocrat by birth. Plato expressed his dissatisfaction with the unstable political arrangements in Athens. The Athenian political structure collapsed completely with the death of Socrates. Plato experienced growing unequal treatment between the rich and the poor, and the whole Athenian society was controlled by unequal exploitative policies. These two are the major reasons behind his theory of justice.

Both he and his master, Socrates, were concerned about a just society. Plato realized that only through the theory of justice and an equal society could justice be established.

Plato's theory of justice is one of the most important subjects in his famous dialogue, Republic. The Republic has ten books, of which book 1 deals with man's life, the nature of justice, and morality.

Plato used the Greek word "Dikaisyne," which means morality or "righteousness." It properly includes the whole man. It also covers the whole field of individual conduct as far as it affects others. [3] From the above reference, we can easily understand that, for Plato, justice is not guided by some of the laws of society but depends upon the moral quality of a man. It is a harmonious bond that protects the weaker section and teaches us that every man should live unitedly. So justice is a bond of cooperation. A just society, for Plato, is one with an eye to the good of the whole. Plato saw justice as an idea and attribute of the mind that expresses itself in a just political and social order. [4]

Plato divided political life of the just society into three classes:

- I. Philosopher king
- II. Warrior or Military class
- III. Artisan or Producer class

These three classes have their own specific duties, and they ought to follow their duties. The philosopher king, or guarding class, has the duty to rule the people; the warrior class is assigned to protect the whole society from within and outside; and the third class, which consists of general people, has only the duty to produce food. He further stated that these three classes should train their minds bravely so that they can perform their duties wisely. To train their minds, Plato is talking about three elements. Reason, courage, and appetite Barker rightly said "For Plato, justice is a social virtue". "Social justice thus may be defined as the principal of a society consisting of different types of men who have combined under the impulse

of their need for one another and, by their combination in one society and their separate functions, have made a whole, which is perfect because it is a product and the image of the whole of the human mind. [5]

Plato wanted to explain that justice is a social bond that unites us, and the bond is only justified when all men perform their duties and strengthen their mind and body so that they can achieve the goal for which they are allotted. Plato believed in excellence in one's own sector. Here is one important theory we have to keep in mind: Plato is more concerned with his philosopher kings and the warrior class, that they would not ignore their duties and make them more devoted towards their work, and he was in favour of abolishing family life, private property, and wives. As these may distract them from their responsibility. Another important point is that Plato rejected Thrasymachus notion of justice, which stated that justice is nothing but the interest of the stronger group in society. So for Plato, justice is deliberative, productive, and acquisitive. [4]

Aristotle on Justice

Aristotle was not an Athenian by birth; he was born in 384 B.C. in Stagira. Being the best educational institution in Greece, Aristotle was also a part of Academia (the institution of Plato). He almost spent his 20 years in Plato's school, and his mind was highly influenced by Plato's teaching.

Just like his teacher, he also enquired about the just society. For him justice should be the guiding stick for state/polity. According to him, "Justice belongs to the polis, for justice in ordering of the political community..." [2]

He identifies justice as a virtue—a virtue of action, a virtue of practice. Justice promotes the common interests of society. He always explains politics with some moral qualities and some norms of ethics. His Nichomachean ethics are his inspiration for his politics. For Aristotle, the state is not a mere political community; it serves the interests of all citizens through a government, school, ethics, and culture. In his Nichomachean Ethics, he shows us how politics is related to moral value. He further states what the basic qualities of a citizen must be to be a member of the polis. A good man can only be a good citizen. Though citizens can only make a just society, these ethical values and rational thinking make us different from other animals. Qualities like cooperation, tolerance, and self-control should be imbibed. All of us are looking for a happy and satisfied life, so here Aristotle advises everyone to practice ethics throughout their lives. His theory of justice also has an ethical orientation. In his own words, "just as the fair and equal are divided into distributive and recti factory justice," [6] In Nichomachean Ethics, Aristotle distinguishes particular justice into two further types: distributive and corrective justice. We will describe this two categories later in this paper in details.

He further understood the nature of justice with man's political nature. As for him man is political in nature. He writes "justice (dikaiosunê) belong to polis for justice is an ordering of political community, and justice (dikae) is judgment as to what is justice." [2]

Aristotle divides justice into two divisions: general and particular justice. Aristotle's General Justice has complete goodness, and Particular Justice is a part of General Justice. His justice has legal value too. General Justice is complete lawlessness and a holy relationship with each other. For Aristotle, "justice has both a particular and a general sense. It is a synonym for virtue, the just man being the virtuous or good man. But here justice deals with only part of virtue, giving people their due. Aristotle maintains that particular justice has two distributive correctives. [7]

By the word "general, we can easily relate it to good for the whole society and "particular justice for him related to the individual justice of a citizen like honor, rewards, and security of the person.

. He further divided particular justice into two other parts: distributive justice and corrective justice. Distributive justice distributes justice according to one's own merit. Equals should be treated equally, and unequal unequally. While corrective justice deals with those who are deprived of fair and just treatment, Eradication of any type of injustice or disadvantage these two justices are elaborately explained in the next reference, "Distributive Justice appeals that a just distribution of consumable goods should be required in the state to ensure justice. So, distributive justice means treating equals equally and unequally, which means that an individual's rights, duties, and rewards should be proportionate to his merit." [6].

If we look at the above discussion, we can find many similarities between their theories on justice. Similarities such as the fact that they both wanted to root out inequality in society, that they both explained justice from moral perception, etc. In spite of these similarities, both of them shared some disagreement as well. They are discussed below:

The Comparison between Plato and Aristotle on Justice

Firstly, Plato discussed his theory from a spiritual and moral perspective. He never explained it from a legal point of view.

On the contrary, the whole idea of Aristotle is based on laws. He presented his theory from a legal perspective.

Secondly, Plato's justice is all about fulfilling duties by his three classes (guardian, soldier, and artisan class) to make a just society. One must adopt some ability while performing their responsibility.

Aristotle said that if an individual does their part of the job perfectly, some reward should be given to them. So Plato explains justice with duty, and Aristotle presents the notion of justice according to an individual's contribution, which should be appreciated by the state.

Thirdly, Plato is completely in favor of the abolition of private property, family life, and wives. As he thought, these could put obstacles in the path of the ruling class and soldiers while they are performing their jobs.

But Aristotle rejected his views on family life, private property, and wives completely. He further said that to make a just society and a happy life, family life and private property are very essential. As he considered man a social animal.

Fourthly, and most importantly, they both gave the theory of distributive justice, but for Plato, distributive justice is all about distributing the duties among his three classes, which were mentioned earlier. He put more emphasis on their performance.

But for Aristotle's distributive justice, which distributes justice equally among the people of society, the people will always receive their portion of justice as per their contribution to society.

Conclusion:

To sum up, we can easily conclude that for Plato, justice is nothing but the duties and performance of the three classes, a bond that holds the society together and that creates a friendly atmosphere within the society. Aristotle explains justice legally. He further classified justice into two categories: general justice and particular justice. They both made their theories to secure their political institutions and were always in favor of maintaining a bond that could connect every citizen in society. Both have similar goals but portray their theories differently. Aristotle tried to fill the gap that his master did not complete through his theory. So at the end, their theories complement each other.

Reference:

- [1]. Afifeh H. The Concept of Justice in Greek Philosophy (Plato and Aristotle). Mediterranean Journal of Social Science. 2014. Vol5. No27.
- [2]. Steven J.H. Aristotle on Political Justice (Symposium). Scholarlycommons@IIT Chicago-Kent college OF law. 1992.
- [3]. D.R. Bhandari. Plato's Concept of Justice: An Analysis. Philosophy Documentation Centre. 1993. Vol3.
- [4] Md. Tanizul I, Md. Humayun K. A Critical Observation of Plato's Theory: A Comparative Analysis.
- [5]. George.H. Sabine. A History of Political Theory. Third Edition. 7-K, Kolhapur Road, Kamala, Delhi-110007, India Post Box No: 2157. Surjeet Publication; 2009. pg.54, 55.
- [6]. Sooraj Kumar.M. The Concept of Justice in Reference with Philosophies of Plato and Aristotle: A Critical Study. Journal of Liberty and International Affairs. 2021. Vol7.No.7.