

ASSESSMENT OF PLATO'S CONCEPT OF JUSTICE: A PARADIGM FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

CHINEDU IFEAKOR, PhD

Department of Philosophy
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Email: cs.ifeakor@unizik.edu.ng

&

ANSELM IKENNA ODO

Department of Educational Foundations
Philosophy of Education Unit
Nasarawa State University, Keffi
Email- anselmikenna4us@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper assesses platonic concept of justice which is very vital in today's discourse, be it in the economic, social, spiritual and all spheres of life. It is so centralized in virtually all human endeavours with unarguable existential relevance. It has from time immemorial attracted the attentions of great thinkers, one of whose idea of the concept "Justice" shall be the centre of our discussion. At the heart of discussion is the perspective of appropriate designation of individuals in the state. The writers argue that, justice consists in giving everyone his due and is achieved in a state when every citizen is assigned according to his profession. The writers further contend that a state where expertise and meritocracy will be the yardstick of appointment, it is only then can be said to have justice in the state. The paper concludes that each class should perform its function efficiently and adequately, without any interference to one another. The paper adds weight in advocating for all strata of the society, the government and the citizens, the rulers and the ruled, peoples of all professions, creeds, walks of life and all men and women of goodwill should play their unique but indispensable roles for the collective good of the society for national development.

Keywords: Justice, Paradigm and National Development

Introduction

The priority regarding to the notion of justice is indubitably the basis to every human society. This is as a result on its requisite to mankind and society; as every act of man-actions and speeches; demands equitable balance of fairness and equity. This is done to maintain a harmonious society devoid of revenge unfair acts. That is why Cephalus¹ defined justice as the act of paying one's debts to the society, self and others in order to ensure equitability.

As observed fact, the world today is suffering untold hardship because of the greedy people we call our leaders. Most persons have been relegated to the background, humiliated, penny-fathered and reduced to a state of abandonment by the joined forces of irresponsible democrats and economic wastefulness. All of these social disorders combine to constitute social injustice, and this leaves the concerned mind to question, whether justice is untenable? One questions, can there be an egalitarian society where justice reigns supreme? One equally wonders if the modern society is oblivious of the rationalization of philosophers right from the dawn of philosophy of what an idea society ought to be.

People are dying every day because of starvation as a result of unjust acts and dispositions of both leaders and the privileged few who find themselves at the corridors of power or in public offices. In addition, the issue of bribery and corruption have become the order of the day. With regard to the distribution of social services, people are being discriminated either by tribe, race, religion or colour, and this makes honest citizens to have little or no chance of progressing. Justice to a large extent has been distorted, and this makes necessary for the concept of justice to be explained.

It is for this that the authors thought provokingly reflected on the meaning, nature and essence of justice in human society. It is important to assert that amongst the large collection of treatises on justice that, of Thomas Aquinas in Grutsch² is widely held as the most plausible and incisive. According to him, 'Justice is giving each one his due. It is a solid and steady will to give to each person that which belongs to the person by right. Justice at all times implies equality. Justice is an essential moral virtue that regulates man in the society with his fellow men. It inclines us to respect the rights of others. The idea of justice is based on the understanding- that all persons are equal and should be treated accordingly. As a result, the regularity, dignity and respect that justice accords people often triggered questions whether there is any rational being that will not cherish to be free? The fact is obviously true that there is no human being who does not want his freedom, for this is innate in every rational being. On this, Aristotle in Stumpf³ encouraged that "man by nature is a social and rational animal who always desires to be free, move and enjoy the environment in which he finds himself".

The concept of justice

The term justice has been noticed as one of the notions that hardly succumb to a similar kind of definition. This is as many people in different ages have taken a stab at to give their own definition of justice. Etymologically, the word 'justice' comes from Latin word 'ius' which means 'right'. Also, the term justice derives its origin from the famous Greek word 'dikaiousuna' which means right or righteousness. It therefore becomes essential that a righteous man is just man. Together with a just man is one who is forever ready to give what belongs to his fellow human. As a result of that, Aldo⁴, yields that, a just person is someone who has a duty and fulfills it. In line with the New Lexicon Dictionary⁵ justice is defined as a behaviour to oneself or to another which is strictly in accord with currently accepted ethical law or as decreed by legal authority (p. 532). In the same vein Omoregbe⁶ affirms that "justice falls under social ethics, which deal with issues of social

orders, moral order and the notion of rightness as they appertain to evolving a sound social order” (p. 99). He furthermore explains that, justice is the quality of being right and fair (p. 99). Ekei⁷ assert that justice is traditionally defined as the right to give everyone his due (p. 142). Consequently, justice is a virtue which makes possible the habitual performance of duty respect for other people’s right. As a virtue it holds that we respect the rights of others persons by keeping what is properly one’s own and doing one’s own jobs. Like so, to show how essential the virtue of justice is, in Plato’s dialogue, Socrates argues that: “Because I think that this is the only virtue which means remains in the state when the other virtues of temperance and courage and wisdom are abstracted, and that is the ultimate cause and condition of the existence of all of them”.

As well, despite the fact that different scholars have different notions of what justice is, they are in agreement on the characteristics of justice which include that:

Justice is a social norm, which is a directive for guiding individuals in their actions toward one another, here, it could be noticed that the emphasis is on “the other” that is to say that justice solely concerns itself with one’s dealing with others. That justice is a probative in the sense that judging an action to be just manifests approval of that action. Finally, that justice is obligatory in that, judging a certain course of action to be just entails that a person in the like situation ought to do same thing (Udechukwu⁸).

Plato’s⁹ notion of justice is expressed justice as doing one’s own work and not meddling with what is not one’s own. This definition seeks the question of what is one’s own work. Plato states that one’s own work is the work that one’s nature is best suited- for, as each person is born with a different nature. Plato compares justice within the human soul to justice within a city. In this city, he places a variety of craftsmen which correspond with the appetitive element of the soul, auxiliaries to guide the city, corresponding to the spirited element, and guardians to rule over the city, as reason rule over the soul. Plato proposes that each person within his city has a defined role, based upon his or her nature, because a city benefits more, if each person does one thing for which is naturally suited’ as opposed to performing many different roles (p. 124). This is similar to how he defined justice that each person is happy in carrying out his or her natural defined role and that in doing so they would make the whole city as happy as possible.

For Plato, justice is achieved when the three classes of people in the state do their respective duties without interfering in another’s duty. He equally equated these to the three parts of the soul: the appetitive, spirit and rational parts that perform their functions in a harmonious way. Hence, the reflection of individual personality that there should be an equitable share of the fruits of the earth so that they can contribute to the general well-being of the community and thus enhance their right to live in a manner worthy of human beings (Subrata and Sushila)¹⁰.

More to this, the origin of justice in Plato’s view is pointed out to on economic need. The society according to him exists in order to satisfy the need of men. In this case, men are not independent on one another but needed to be helped by the cooperation of others in

the production of necessities of life. However, apart from this, the society does not exist only to further the economic needs of men, but it also exists for the happiness of men in the state. This means that one exists in order to render services to each other for national development. In carrying out your services effectively bring about happiness.

From the above view, Plato is asserting that the existence of a society also refers to other services which culminate in the attainment of man's happiness in the state. This is attainable through the principle of justice that a society must always conform to always. In this context, the society decides what is just and what is unjust. Hence, this decision must be made by the ruler which Plato ascribes as (state men) a philosopher king because of his wisdom in decision-making discernment.

In addition, Plato's notion of justice is considered as a realization of one's function. In this case, justice could be compared to the efficient function of things. A vehicle for instance, is said to be good only and only if all its mechanisms are cooperatively working, this fulfills its function. This assertion is applicable to all spheres of human endeavors that call for collaborative efforts. Hence, in viewing justice as the fulfillment of one's function, Plato asks: has the soul a function that can be performed by something else? The answer to the question raised above by Plato is 'no', for everything has its efficient function and when this function is interfering (seized) by some other agents there will be injustice. Consequently, Plato further views justice as the fulfillment of the duty of each component of the sound hierarchy in the state which is their essential duties base on natural endowments upon which they are best fitted.

Classifying justice under the human soul, Plato opines that every human soul has three qualities: rational, spirit and appetitive, with justice as the fourth virtue architectonic in nature, balancing and harmonizing the other three qualities. Thus the soul has the power to comprehend the ideal of good. The soul is only said to be just when its three component parts carry out their assigned functions efficiently without any intrusion of any other component that makes part of the soul. The function of reason for instance is to rule other components of the soul and to make decisions. It is a function that belongs solely to reason, therefore according to Plato¹¹, the faculty of reason will be said to be just if and only if it carries its efficient function of ruling other components of the soul effectively. Besides, Plato considers justice as a harmonious process whereby each part of the state performs its appropriate role without interfering with the proper functioning of the other part. In the same vein, justice is at once a part of human virtue and the bond which joins man together in the society. It is the identical quality that makes good and social society.

Hence, justice is not the mere strength to do one's work but it is a harmonious strength. It is not the right of the strong, but the effective harmony of the whole. Therefore, all moral conception revolves about the good of the whole- individual as well as the society. It was the socio-political situation in Athens during the time of Plato, concerning the organization of citizens in the State that led him to conclude that the major problem, which causes the un-progressiveness of any state, is deeply rooted in the inability of the citizens to organize themselves well. The organization entails an understanding of the fact that every citizen is not only unique, but also endowed naturally with some specific

aptitudes or talents. Our needs require many skills, and no one possesses all the skills needed to produce food, shelter, and clothing, to say nothing of the other various arts.

Principally, the notion of justice has three traditional classifications, which are legal, distributive and commutative. Apart from these, justice could also be categorized into the following forms:

1. Moral justice,
2. Social justice, and
3. Restorative justice.

1. Moral Justice

Justice as a divine law is commanding, and indeed the whole morality, is the authoritative command, killing is wrong and therefore must be punished and if not punished what should be done? There is a famous paradox called Euthyphro dilemma, which essentially asks is something right because God command it or does God command it because it is right? If the former, the justice is arbitrary; if the later; then morality exists on a high order than man, who become little more than a power on a moral knowledge some divine command advocates respond by pointing out that the dilemma is false; goodness is the very nature of God and is necessarily expressed in his commands. According to Cook¹² justice has various types and classifications. This can be classified under the following:

- a. **Distributive Justice or Economic Justice:** This is concerned with giving all member of society a fair share of the benefits and resources available. However, while everyone might agree that wealth should be distributed fairly, there is much disagreement about what counts as fair share possible criteria of distribution are equity, equality and need. Equality means that one's rewards should be equal to one's contributions to a society. While equity means that everyone gets some amount regardless of their input. Distributive on the basis of need means that people who need more will get more while people needless will get less, fair allocation of resources or distribution of justice.
- b. **Procedural Justice:** This is concerned with making and implementing decision according to due processes that ensure fair treatment. Rules must be impartially followed and consistently applied in order to generate an unbiased decision. Those who carryout the procedures should be natural, and those directly affected by the decision should have some voice or representation in the decision-making process. If people believe procedures to be fair, they will be more likely to accept outcomes, even ones that they do not like.

2. Social justice

It is a political and philosophical theory which asserts that there are dimensions to the concept of justice beyond those embodied in the principles of civil or criminal law, economic supply and demand, or traditional moral frameworks. Social justice tends to focus more on just relations between groups within society as opposed to the justice of individual conduct or justice for individuals.

3. Retributive Justice

This type of justice appeals to the notion of just which centers on the idea that people desires to be treated in the same way they treat others. It is a retroactive approach that justifies punishment as a response to past injustice or wrongdoing. The central idea is that the offender has gained unfair advantages through his or her behavior, and the punishment will set this unbalance straight in other want. Those who do not play by the rules should be brought to justice and deserve to suffer penalties for their transgressions. Retributive justice plays a central role in legal proceeding responding to violating of international law and human right and whose crime is adjudicated. However, because, there is a tendency to slip from retributive justice to an emphasis on revenge, some suggest that retributive justice focuses on violations as crimes with healing victims' wounds, restoring offenders to law abiding lives, and repairing harm done to interpersonal relationships and the community. Victims take an active role in directing the exchange that takes place, as well as defining the responsibilities and obligations of offenders. Offenders are encouraged to understand the harm they have causes their victims and take responsibilities for it. Restorative justice arms to strengthen the community and prevent similar harms from happening in the future. At the national level, such processes are often carried out through victim offender mediation programs. While at the international level restorative justice is often a matter of instituting truth and reconciliation.

National Development

National development according to Munasinghe¹³ is a process of improving the range of opportunities that will enable individual humans and communities to achieve their aspirations and full potential over a sustained period of time while maintaining the resilience of economic, social and environmental systems. In the same vein, Age¹⁴ was able to figure out some objectives which national development is expected to realize: increase capital income and employment, promoting human welfare satisfying basic needs, protecting the environment. The authors viewed National Development as a progress of a nation in all ramification; which centers for the welfare of an individual and for the nations at large.

Paradigm

In science and Philosophy, a paradigm is a distinct set of concepts or thought patterns, including theories, research methods, postulates and standards for what constitutes legitimate contributions to a field.

Justice: A Paradigm for National Development

Now, considering critically Plato's notion on Justice, Plato's concept of justice is a good piece, which if adopted will help to address the societal challenges for national development. Plato's idea on justice was based on two definitions of justice in his book titled Republic. Where he avers that Justice is harmony, Justice is doing one's own job. Plato offered two main equivalences to examine the definition of justice. The division of soul into parts, as well as the parts of the state; the soul is divided into three parts, the appetitive, spirited and the rational. The state is also divided into three types of people, the workers, soldiers and the rulers. The workers are the people that best fitted to practice

a specific form of labour. It is part of the society whose role is to provide food, clothes and any other necessities the state requires for national development. They are required to be moderate and obedient to their ruler. The soldiers are the people that best fitted to fight, people that are spirited and that pass the tests of the state by holding firmly to the patriotic attitude needed in order to defend the state from foreign and domestic enemies. They must possess the virtue of courage and be well educated in order to stay loyal and not harm the citizens. Although, they possess the virtue of wisdom, they must not seek the glory of and fame of being a ruler rather it should be perceived as the duty of those who are fitted to rule to take on the burden of ruling their state. The rulers are people that have the interest of whole in mind, they love their state, and they understand its rule and therefore will do everything within their power to preserve it for the betterment of its people.

Conclusion

In sum, each class should perform its function efficiently and adequately, without any interference to one another. This fosters communal growth and national development. As this should create room for respect, mutual talents and healthy relationship among the citizens. On the merit of this, the state undertakes to organize society in such that the citizen can enjoy peace and justice, and the citizen in return agrees to perform his patriotic duties. This means that the essence of the state is to make an individual to live in harmonious way which in turn makes the people in the state participate actively in their specific duties for national development.

Recommendations

1. This work therefore, bacons on the Nigerian state, to adhere to the theory of separation of powers as is the practice in other democratic states of the world taken account of our historical past and the urgent need to modernization where necessary. Any dictatorial tendency should be nibbled on the bud.
2. We should guard against broad spectrum of the ills like absurd judgement avaricious and ambitious self-serving behaviour and inefficient performances of functions. It is obvious that the essence of the doctrine of separation of powers is to protect the arbitrariness of rules.
3. All strata of the society, the government and the citizens, the rulers and the ruled, peoples of all professions, creeds, walks of life and all men and women of goodwill should play their unique but indispensable roles for the collective good of the society. The auxiliaries, the guardians, and indeed the artisans should play their noble, unique and indispensable roles effectively and efficiently for justices to rein supreme.
4. Those who take leadership positions should be trained rigorously before they will be allowed to practice because the art of leadership is very technical. Moreover, government officials should learn the business of government that is selfless, sacrificial and unreserved service to humanity and not a money making business.

5. Also, those in the economic class-the masses should contribute their lot. So that together, all playing their roles based on qualification by natural ability and training, we may build a nation where justice shall reign. Remember, the task to kick out corruption out of Nigeria is a collective responsibility of all Nigerian. But there cannot be development without peace. Hence, do what you are qualified both by nurture and training as well, you would be fostering justice. It is only when all hands are on deck that our most cherished justice can flourish to the happiness of all and national development.

References

1. Celphalus *Plato on Justice* retrieved from <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.2.1.html> 11:13am 18/07/2018.
2. Gratsch, Edward J. *Aquinas's Summa: An Introduction and Interpretation*. India: Bangalore Theological Publications, 2008.
3. Stumphf, S. *Philosophy: History and Problem*. New York: McGraw-hill Publication, 1971.
4. Vendemiati, A. *In the First Person: An outline of General Ethics*. Cynthia R. Trans. Urbaniana: University Press, 1999.
5. New lexico dictionary Ruben Codos 2003.
6. Omoregbe, J. *Knowing Philosophy*. Logos: Joja Educational Research and Publishers limited, 1990.
7. Ekei, C. *Justice in Communalism*. Nigeria: realm Communication Limited, 2001.
8. Udechukwu. H. *Justice: The Basis of Authentic Peace and Development*. Nigeria: Snaap Press Limited, 2007, pg 8.
9. Plato, *The Republic* (trans) Desmond Lee 2nd ed Middlesex: Penguin Books, pg 124, 1974.
10. Subrata, M. & Sushila R. *A History of Political Thought: Plato to Marx*. Delhi: Prentice-hall of India Private Limited, Pg 68, 1999.
11. Opp Cit 1974.
12. Cook. *Distributive justice, Equity, and Equality-Annual Reviews*. Retrieved from <https://www.annualreviews.org>doi>pdf>, 2020.
13. Munasinghe, S. *Effective instructions through dynamic discipline*. Ohio, Charles E. Merill, 2011.
14. Age, E. *Objectives of teaching Education in Nigeria*. London, British Council., 2005.