POLI 341: ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL POLITICAL THOUGHT

Session 3 – PLATO'S THEORY OF JUSTICE AND THE IDEAL STATE

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1

Session Overview

- Welcome to session 3: **Plato's Theory of JustiƉe aŶd Ideal State**.
- In this session, our intention is for you to understand the background of Plato and situate his writing within a certain context so you can appreciate why he wrote the way he wrote.
- We will introduce you to the experiences that shaped his understanding of the political system, the methods he employed and his political philosophy.
- We ‖ ill also iŶtƌoduƉe Lͻu to oŶe of the ŵost iŵpoƌtaŶt ƉoŶtƌolliŶg thought of Plato's political theory**.**
- The ƉoŶƉept of justiƉe is oŶe of the ŵost iŵpoƌtaŶt paƌts of Plato's *The Republic.*
- According to Sabine, the theory of the state in the Republic culminates in the conception of justice.
- The Ideal state is the highest manifestation of goodness, morality and idealism and naturally in such a state justice cannot be relegated to the background in this session.
- He argues that the state is the product of human soul or mind.
- He thought that there is an analogy between the individual and the state, and that the life of the individual is the counterpart of the life in the state.
- Please let us take you through this all-important segment of our discussions on Plato.

Session outline

This session covers the following topics:

- The Background of Plato

- The Theory of Justice

- The Ideal State

- Plato's ClassifiÐatioŶ of Go|edŶŵeŶt

TOPIC ONE

The Background of Plato **(427-347 BC)**

Plato's Life

- Plato was born of a distinguished Athenian family in 427 B.C., in the closing days of the golden age of Pericles.
- The Peloponnesian War had broken out among Greek cities about twenty years before Plato's birth.
- The protagonists on either side were Athens and Sparta, the two principal city-states in Greece. After some traces and many vicissitudes the struggle finally ended in 404 B.C., with the defeat of Athens.
- At his youth, Plato came under influence of Socrates, one of the most remarkable personalities of whom history bears record.
- Plato died in 347 BC at the age of 80.
- The death of Pericles had marked the moment when men of thought and the men of action began to take different paths, destined to diverge more and more widely until the stoic sage renounced his local allegiance to become a citizen of the universe.
- The Athenians became less cautious in its policy towards its own allies, whom it began to treat as part of the Athenian empire, and much less cautious in strategy, which eventually led to the debacle of the expedition to Syracuse.
- To Plato, this drifting apart of men of thought and the men of action was a disastrous calamity, indeed the root of the social evils of the time.

- The tuđŶiŶg poiŶt iŶ Plato's life Đaŵe iŶ the Lьeađ 399, ǁheŶ he ǁas tǁeŶtLJ-eight years old. In that year, Socrates, then about seventy years, was put on trial (despite a famous pronouncement by the Delphic Oracle that he was the wisest man in Greece) before the Athenian courts on charges of disbelieving in the gods of the city, of introducing new deities, and of corrupting the youth.

- Plato refused to adopt any of the devices by which he might have secured as acquittal, and delivered an uncompromising defense of his way of life.

- He was found guilty by the majority of votes and condemned to death.

- He accepted the sentence with his accustomed serenity, and in the interval which elapsed between his trial and execution refused to countenance the efforts of his friends to contrive his escape.

- Plato had family connections in both the oligarchic and democratic parties, and as a well-born youth with foot in both camps, it was natural for his to ĐoŶsideđ a politiĐal Đadeeđ ďut SoĐđates' edžeĐutioŶ ĐhaŶged his plaŶs.

- IŶ faĐt the stateŵeŶt thaƚ if he ǁeđe iŶ aŶLJ ǁaLJ ǁiseđ thaŶ otheđ ŵeŶ, it ǁas ďeĐause he kŶeǁ his oǁŶ igŶođaŶĐe, ǁhi le otheđs did Ŷot has ďeeŶ đefeđđed to as SoĐđates iđoŶLJ

6

Plato's Life ;ĐoŶt'đ

- The political experience of the Athens of his youth and early manhood appears to have sickened Plato. As he says in the autoďiogɖaphiĐSe| eŶth Letteɖ *I was forced, in fact, to the belief that the hope of finding justice for society or for the individual lay in true philosophy, and that mankind will have no respite from trouble until either real philosophers gain political power or politicians become by some miracle true philosophers".*

- Plato founded the Academy in Athens in 386 where he taught for the rest of his life.

- Apart from the *Republic*, Plato wrote two other books on politics, *The Statesman* and *The Laws*.

- Plato was the first ancient thinker to write systematically on the subject of politics.

Methods used by Plato

- Plato's disꝹo|eꝺLJ‖ as that kŶo‖ledge iŶ the stꝺiꝹt seŶse of the ‖ oꝺd ꝺaŶ d'e extended by the use of a right method beyond the single certainty of ignorance.
- Plato used dialectics which he borrowed from Socrates.
- In Socrates days the teacher and the pupil sat together.
- Either Socrates or someone asked question and the answer came from anyone.
- Plato used this method even when he was among the public.
- Neither Socrates nor Plato had the desire to impose any particular idea upon anybody.
- Plato was a real teacher who wanted the people he taught to think in their own way.
- The main function of the dialogue method and ultimately the dialectics was to make the mind concrete and enlightened.
- He normally started with the most general and ordinary opinion and step by step he tried to enter into the depth of the subject.
- He normally drew analogy from nature and particularly from animal world to illustrate his point.

8

Discussions of Sparta

- Plato observed that Sparta had been organised as a military caste.
- It was a community of people who cherished bravery.
- Every citizen was considered a soldier.
- Education, mating and all social activities were strictly regulated to attain high military standards.
- Every new born baby was subjected to strict scrutiny. It was only healthy babies who were taken over by the state at the age of seven.
- They were imbued with the spirit of patriotism.
- At the age of thirty, they moved out of barracks to stay with their partners. They, however, had to return to barracks regularly.
- Adult life: Sparta discriminated against aliens. They also had slaves called helots.

DisꞒussioꞐs of Sparta ;ꞒoꞐt'ꝺ

- They encouraged very simple and modest way of living.
- There was nothing like individual preferences.
- The interest of the state took precedence over everything.
- **Constitutional arrangement**: Spartan society had elections of magistrates and council of elder; they had a kingship system and a head of state.

Plato observed that Sparta society:

- **Had the merit of sterling discipline**
- **Absolute respect for law**
- **Towering dedication to the state**
- **High level of courage**
- He also opined that Spartan society produced citizens who were stupid, greedy and brutal to their less privileged class called the Helots (slaves).

10

Athenian Democracy

- Plato also focused attention on Athens which he considered much liberated that the other city-states.
- In Athens, every office was subjected to elections.
- Plato was not a fun of democracy.
- Some commentators have even described him as an enemy of open society.
- Plato did not believe in democracy because he maintained that leaders could sometimes pander to the whims and caprices of voters, leading to distortion of values.
- He argued that democracies had the tendency of degenerating into tyranny, thereby promoting instability.
- To him too much premium is put on voting thereby promoting mediocrity over excellence, amateurism over professionalism and ignorance over true knowledge.
- He was particularly upset when 501 members of the democratic court voted by a large majority for the execution of Socrates.

AtheŶiaŶ DeŵoĐraĐy ;ĐoŶt'd

- **According to Plato, politics or government demanded knowledgeable people to haŶdle it. IŶ his oŵŶ ǁords, the oŶly Đure for the ills of contemporary society was the establishment of philosophical rule, that either philosophers should become rulers, or that existing rulers should ďeĐoŵe philosopher.**

- He saw in Athens stupid people rule with favouritism and nepotism to the disadvantage of the masses.

- Plato idolized bravery but did not believe that military training alone was enough to build the knowledge required of a ruler.

- Plato found in each of the four forms of government, Timarchy, Oligarchy, democracy and tyranny an iota of good, but in each was predominantly a seedbed of bad government.

- Plato argued that though man is imperfect, something perfect can be done.

- He therefore assigns the art of ruling to those who have the capacity for deep thinking, which include philosophers, scholars, scientists etc.

Plato's Political Philosophy

- Plato's principal work of political philosophy has a double title: it is called the *Republic, or concerning justice.*

- The Republic is Plato's main attempt to define in non-abstract terms how an individual can fulfil himself, can attain happiness or live the good life.

- The ambitious project of the book was to demonstrate that morality is beneficial to its possessors.

- Immoral behaviour brings one into conflict with others and is so disruptive of external unity.

- In fact, immoral behaviour is an external manifestation of internal disunity.

TOPIC TWO

Plato's Theory of Justice

Definition of Justice

- According to Plato justice is to perform the nature-oriented duty.
- Each class and each individual will perform their duty and no oŶe ‖ i ll iŶtedfede iŶ othed's aĐti|i ties.
- Plato maintains that in the case of citizens generally each individual should be put to the use for which nature intended him.
- Plato did not conceive justice as in the judiciary.
- We thiŶk of justiĐe aŶd iŶjustiĐe pdiŵadilLJas dualities displayed in the exercise of a judicial administrative function.
- JustiĐe iŶ Plato ŵeaŶs ŶeadlLJ‖h at ‖ e ŵeaŶ dLJ ŵodalitLJ
- JustiĐe is Ŷot a set of do's aŶd doŶ'ts.

Architectonic Nature of Justice

- The architectonic nature of justice accounts for that element of restraint which is the first thing apparent in it.

- Just as the authority of the architect touches the subordinates craftsmen as a restrict force, curbing the exuberance of their production, confining their scope and limiting their freedom in the interest of the design as a whole, so justice operates as a restraint upon a man's particular capacity, i.e. withholding him from many things which he has both the desire and the ability to do.

- Justice is one of the virtues as alluded to elsewhere in this module.

- The following illustration by Foster will shed some light on this architectonic role of justice. *A carpenter with a high degree of finesse manufactures a door. But the excellence of the door will not be judged in isolation. The other parts of the building are to be brought under consideration while analysing and estimating the design and beauty of the building. The design and the dimension of the door must be in harmony with other features of the building. The carpenter cannot do this job; it is the architect's job. Architect's skill has no special department, but it is present in all departments. Justice's in Plato's opinion plays the role of an architect. It acts as a control office upon the capacities of individuals and states.*

Criticisms of the Theory of Justice

- Se|e̅a̅l Ð̅d̅i̅t̅i̅Ð̅i̅s ̂ws ha|e d'eeŶ le|elled agaiŶst Plato's theo̅d̅LJof justice. These are considered below.

- Firstly, Plato argued that the doctrine of specialization is vital precondition for justice and harmony of society. But he has not discussed the conflict that will arise among the members of the same class or among different classes.

- Secondly, Plato contends that there can be harmony in the body politic if all the category of or persons and classes can practice self-control and adhere to their own appointed businesses.
  - It stands to reason that without self-control justice can never be achieved.
  - The snag is that self-control is a moral principle and not a legal one. If people fail to practice it, there will be a problem.

Criticisms of the Theory of Justice ;ÐoŶt'đ

- Thirdly, Plato argues that the guardian class will predominate in the society because they are endowed with wisdom.
  - It is possible for a class with these overwhelming powers to establish hegemony in the state.
  - The contention of Plato that the subordination of one class to the other will ensure unity in the state will promote unity is untenable.
  - In point of fact, equal share in the affairs of the state is a vital step towards the removal of grievances and hence ensures unity.

- IŶ Plato's theođLJof justiÐe, theđe is Ŷo speÐial ođ sepađate eŶtitLJof individual. He is not an isolated self, but part of the whole order and the order is the ideal state.

- Plato considered that the state ought to be small. He observed that the largest of the city-state in Greece had a population of 300,000 and the smallest with a population of 10,000-30,000.

TOPIC THREE

THE IDEAL STATE

The Human Soul and The State

- Plato, in classifying the human soul, follows the classification of Pythagoras's three classes.
- Pythagorean three classifications are; lovers of wisdom, lovers of honour and lovers of wealth.
- This corresponds to Plato's three classification of the human soul, which include; reason, and spirit and appetite.
- The reason leads men how to learn and how to love. A man without reason cannot know fully and also love properly.
- For the state to function effectively, reason must be present.
  - Guided by reason, the ruler of the state can know the mind of the people.

- The second element of the mind or the soul identified by Plato is spirit.
  - Spirit encourages man to fight.
  - Plato finds in spirit the ambition and competition.
  - Courageous people are spirited.
  - Spirited men fight against injustice.

The Human Soul and The State (cont'd)

- There emerges an arrangement of three classes or groups. These are as follows:

- The first class is the Philosopher-guardians, who will rule by virtue of their superior rational endowment, which gives them access to the relevant knowledge.

- The second is the military, which is responsible for the defense of the city-state.

- Finally, Producers- a class which will provide for the economic needs of the citizens-body as a whole.

- The most important division is between the highest function, i.e. that of ruling and the other two i.e. the military and the producers.

- The crucial point in all of these is that power is to remain exclusively in the hands of those properly capable of wielding it.

The Individual Soul

- The individual soul is also found to have three parts, or aspects, corresponding to the three parts of the state, and it will be just, when each of the three parts performs its own proper function.

- A just state therefore, is the one in which each member will perform that function, and only that function, for which he is destined by nature.

- The three part of the soul are the **rational,** which entitles us to be called rational beings, the **spirited**, responsible for our higher emotions such as anger, and the **appetitive,** which is responsible for our lower desires.

- But a just soul will also be wise, courageous and self-controlled or temperate.

- It will be just because the rational part is in the right condition, courageous because the spirited part is so and self-controlled because the lower parts agree to be ruled by the highest.

- Similarly the just state will be wise by virtue of the excellence of its rulers, courageous because of the quality of its soldiers and self-controlled in so far as the members of the highest class set a limit to the desires of the two classed.

Plato's Theory of Forŵs

- The starting point with Plato is the belief that the metaphysical is superior to the physical. It is superior morally, cognitively, and in its eternal reality. The physical, the world of sense, is full of birth and death, growth and decay.

- The physical appears and disappears, it exists fragmentarily. The metaphysical is the essential reality behind or above existential appearances.

- Plato, like other Greek philosophers, was impressed by mathematics. The superiority of the intellect over the sensual-passioŶs aŶd appetites ‖ould d'e closer to his terminology.

- Let us illustrate the Platonic distinction between the physical and the metaphysical by the familiar example of the rose. What we see in a rose is a collection of colours, shapes and textures, that last one month and next month will not exist. We attach the Ŷaŵe ɑose to this ĐolleĐtioŶ oŶ ILJd'eĐause ‖e ha| e a ŵeŶtal ĐoŶĐeptioŶ of ‖hat od'jeĐti| e ɑualïfiĐatioŶs ŵust d'e ŵet d'LJaŶLJĐaŶdidate foɑ ɑosiŶess; it is the Platonic claim that such mental conceptions have more reality than sensual impressions.

- Interestingly, almost anyone can have an accurate collection of the simpler ideas, or forms-shoes, boats, chairs, cow etc. But only those who have an innate capacity for collection and who subject themselves to long and rigorous discipline will have accurate conception of the more general forms- beauty, justice, friendship etc.

Plato's Theory of For... ;...oŶt'...

- The three part of the soul correspond to the three functions of the state. These are deliberative, protective and acquisitive.
- Reasonable or rational people are entrusted with the deliberative function.
- Men having courage take the charge of protecting the state from any attack.
- People who are endowed only with appetite are engaged in productive activities.
- It is the duty of the state to develop the faculty in each individual.
- The state has to place each individual at his appropriate position. This is the state Plato referred to as a just state.
- To him, rulers have the ability to make sound decisions.

Virtues of Good Community

- According to Plato a community will be called good if it possesses four cardinal virtues of the Greeks.
- Virtue in man is that quality which the better man posses in a higher degree that the worse.
- Human virtue must be what makes a man good.
- Wisdom is important because it ensure good deliberation. Wisdom resides in those who are responsible for the deliberative function of government.
- One other virtue is courage. Plato defines courage as the power to resist fear. Even though Plato thinks that courage does not only reside in the army, he posits that it is at the battle ground that it is properly tested.
- Another important virtue of good community is self-control. According to Plato the human soul is divided into two parts, i.e. inferior and superior parts.
  - Self-control implies that the inferior part should be submissive to the superior part.

Classifications of Government

- Plato states that in all states there cannot be only one type of government.
- The states are as the men are, they grow out of human characters.
- Plato argues that government exist to suit the character and temperament of the people.
- Plato identified four main forms of government.
- These included timocray, oligarchy, democracy and tyranny.
- Plato states that the ideal state is a perfect one because it contains all three elements of human soul: reason, spirit and appetite.
- **Timocracy** is a corrupt form of ideal state and it is the first corruption form of government.
- Timocracy is the least corrupt form of government on the ground that here Platonic reform of marriage is not strictly followed.

Classifications of Government

- **Oligarchy** is the second corrupt ideal state. Plato argues that oligarchy is a government resting on a valuation of property, in which the rich have power and the poor man is deprived of it.

- Plato explains the transition from timocracy to oligarchy.

- Oligarchy creates opportunities for the rich to accumulate wealth and precious metals. In the view of Plato, the rich accumulated wealth in order to enhance both power and prestige.

- In oligarchy, instead of loving contention and glory, men become lovers of trade and money, they honour and look up to the rich man and make a rule of his and dishonour the poor man.

Classifications of Government

- The transition from oligarchy to democracy is very interesting.
- In oligarchy property qualification becomes the priority everywhere.
- The poor people are deprived of political power and this makes them angry. Anarchy becomes the order of the day.
- Poor men rise against their opponents. Killing and slaughtering become a very normal affair of the state.
- Rule of law becomes a scarce commodity.
- Poor people become restless and finally they capture political power. Oligarchy therefore gives way to democracy.

- The third form of government identified by Plato was democracy. The basis of **democracy** is appetite for power and glory. There is freedom and liberty and everyone fights to capture power. This creates the worst form of anarchy and disorder.
- He says that not everyone can claim power.
- The best must always rule the rest.

Classification of Government

- Plato says that the seed of tyranny can always be found in a democracy.
- He sees tyranny as the worst form of government.
- Tyranny arises out of democracy.
- The most aggravated form of tyranny and slavery is the most extreme for of liberty.
- Plato posits that when people exercise excessive liberty it leads to anarchy.
- Power brokers and self-seekers utilise the anarchical situation to their advantage.
- In the midst of the confusion and the turmoil, someone appears as the saviour of the people and without any delay captures political power.
- In both democracy and tyranny appetite plays a dominant role.
- **The** main objective of the tyrant is to achieve personal gain and not the well-being of the people (Das, 2001:35).