
Plato and John Rawls on Social Justice

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ABSTRACT

Issues related to justice are visible in our daily lives and also discussed in almost all spheres of human endeavor. From antiquity, individuals have been concerned with the problem of justice; however it became a subject of rational discourse from the time of the Sophists and Socrates. From that time, different philosophers have tried to define what it entails and also gave vivid explanation as to how it could be solved. Plato sees justice as loyalty to the order within the soul, example seen within a well structured society. Thus, by understanding the character of the soul and justice in this manner, one will appreciate justice within the society. Whereas, John Rawls visualize justice as fairness and describe fairness to be the dictates that reasonable and free kinsmen can accept to on a neutral position with a sight of advancing their wellbeing. The paper is an endeavor to evaluate the theory of justice from Plato to Rawls.

KEYWORDS: *Social Justice, Plato, John Rawls*

INTRODUCTION

The inquiry into what justice is and the best way to explicate or describe it has often proved an arguable subject from the early years of philosophy. The dilemma has extended throughout the ancient and medieval epoch when Plato, Socrates, the Sophists and others have talk about it. Justice is a notion that concerns only to other-bound human actions. The problem of justice and injustice merely spring up when there are several individuals and some practical deliberation concerning their circumstances and/or relations with one another. In one sense, it is a tangible, intended, and identifiable principle (i.e., reverence for human rights) that provides the groundwork for a free society. Justice, in such context, means to reverence free choice. In turn, to be ‘just and moral’ in a normative sense (i.e., as a central, social virtue of human thriving) requires respect for individual free choice. Only free persons can be just and moral persons. Justice is a perception, we recognize, we appreciate, even if, we have complexity in putting the idea into words. The paper is an endeavor to evaluate the theory of justice from two important philosopher throughout the history of philosophy; Plato and Rawls.

JUSTICE

Justice as opined by *The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* is defined as ‘the fair treatment of people or the quality of being fair or reasonable’(Hornsby). Thomas Aquinas also defines justice as ‘the strong and firm will to give to each his due’ (O’Callaghan, 461). Russell observation on the prospect of addressing the view of justice, claim:

A question such as *what is justice?* is eminently suited for discussion in a Platonic dialogue. We all freely use the words *just* and *unjust*, and, by examining the ways in which we use them, we can arrive inductively at the definition that will best suit with usage. All that is needed is knowledge of how the words in question are used. But when our inquiry is concluded, we have made only a linguistic discovery, not a discovery in ethics (Russell, 1945).

Numerous meanings can in reality be given to justice, that is: justice in a widest sense, justice in a narrow sense, lastly justice in a proper sense. In widest senses, which correspond to its universal connotation, for instance, in Ancient Egyptian Wisdom Literature and Old Testament, justice means moral uprightness, goodness, faultlessness or perfection. In a narrow sense, justice means compliance to or with governing law (Brecht and Peter 90). In the third usage, which is a proper sense, justice is understood as the *melodious operation of the essential parts of an individual or in the state* (Brecht and Peter 90).

Social justice, which is the portion of justice this paper shall focus on, as a concept, is often accredited to have been coined by Jesuit priest Luigi Taparelli (1793-1862) (Braithwaite, 175), and it has become popular through the instrumentality of Anthonio Rosmini-Serbat (1797-1855) (Hölscher 13). Taparelli and Rosmini both envisaged social justice to be a simple formal concept rather than a material and real concept; that is, social justice was initially regarded by them to mean just a feature of justice like commutative justice and did not have any vigor or philosophical connotation. Consequently, the concept of social justice at the onset was basically an expansion of the existing, customary idea of justice into a new area, which is society in general. If someone is talking of the scheme of justice at work in the world today and chooses to look only at the negative aspects, this view may well be deserved. One element of the definition of justice is the ultimate outcome of the process of law, or the judicial system whereby justice is disseminated by the State. By this definition, justice is the mechanical development of the formation of law - put in place and approved to by the people of the State. Another meaning is concerned with the value intrinsic in 'just' conduct. Simplistically define; this is identical with "fair" (Chandler 256). The full-fledged word for this same notion is "equity". One difference between these two definitions is the disparity between an individual point of view and the larger view of society. Either view integrates the idea of moral judgment, which is; 'good' as opposed to 'bad'.

Plato on Justice

In *The Republic*, Plato builds up the theory that justice is entrenched in the tasks of both an individual and the structured society. After condemning the conventional theories of justice existing, stipulated by Polemarchus, Cephalus, and Thrasymachus (Bassey, 1353), Plato propounded his theory of justice according to which, justice is a *human virtue* that makes an individual good, self-consistent and socially. Justice is a social awareness that makes a society internally harmonious and excellent. A well structured society for Plato must contain three classes: the guardian or ruler, troopers, and also the workers or artisans related to the soul which has the rational, spirited and the appetitive nature. Society is recognized by the principles that are intrinsic to the soul of an individual and the qualities of the soul can be compared to the classes of persons that make-up a society. Justice seems to be a relation

between these categories; every doing what befits it (Plato, 1991). Plato's social justice theory (Plato, 1991) focuses on the requirement for each man to hold out his duty efficiently and expeditiously. This, in his view, this will bring order and justice. Justice for Plato is also a sort of specialization. It is, consequently, not born of fear of the weak but of the longing of the human soul to do a duty according to its nature. For Plato every individual have natural capabilities and falls within the three classes specified. Plato (Plato, 1991) is convinced that social justice is directly related to individual justice such that an understanding of justice in the social dimension simply entails understanding it in the individual sense. The purpose of justice for an individual can be understood through the example of the operation of his ideal state. Justice for Plato is defined by the dichotomy of Good and Evil and make clear by the principles of truth and order. Plato presents his theory of *the Republic* as based on supremacist classes (of philosophers) that are best able to rule over all other classes of individuals, why others classes have their specific rules to play (Joseph and Bassey 59). All the constituent division, or classes, of the society as envisioned by Plato, executes only those responsibilities for which they are best appropriate. The society functions as an outcome of an individual's utter compatibility with the duty they are allotted and to which they are naturally suited. In this regard, Thrasymachus is right to point to the gap involving morals and self-interest (Chappell 16). However, the answer given by Socrates in Plato's *dialogue* do not provide an accurate definition, but rather a demystify remark on justice, when he claimed that it is 'the advantage of the stronger' (Flew 436). Plato argues his position by giving attention to detail evading simplicity. For him it is not the abstract speculation that is of significance but the practical appliance as viewed through the learning of the exemption.

John Rawls on Justice

In *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls trust that justice is an *a priori* right natural to an individual despite the maneuverings of societal norms and institutions. He also believed in the notion of "fairness" (Wenar 214). The *original position* is an essential feature of John Rawls's accord account of justice, "justice as fairness (Frazer 2007). It's designed to be a good and unbiased point of view that's to be implemented in our reasoning regarding basic principles of justice. In grasping this point of view, we have to imagine ourselves within the position of free and equal persons who conjointly agree upon and commit ourselves to principles of social and political justice. He begins by referring an example concerning "the veil of ignorance," where individuals are placed in an "original position" (Ackerly 76). They are given the foremost basic information concerning society and are supposed to continue solely based on their morals, with none specific knowledge concerning their own selves or laws foretold. This causes the "group of actors" to effectively abide alone by astonishingly comprehensive rules and laws of morality. Rawls says: "Moral conclusions can be reached without abandoning the prudential standpoint of positing, a moral outlook merely by pursuing one's own prudential reasoning under certain procedural bargaining and knowledge constraints" (Rawls 126). After this "experimentation" regarding the veil of ignorance, Rawls wind up that anything that the group of actors would come up with or in conformity on behind the veil, based typically based on their morals, should to be reasonable principles. He is cautious to admit that this doesn't mean that individuals are all the same. In fact, each person has vastly completely diverse goals in life. However, underneath this ethical blanket principle, each person is afforded the same chance to increase their skills to pursue their

dreams or objectives. Rawls posits that rather than an individual competition, society should to be a team game, wherever each person collaborates to make positive all reach the same reasonable goal, all on equal level. The veil of ignorance enlightens how society would function if each person was unclothed of advantages and classes, under equal laws and given the same chance. Rawls also envisage that this version of justice would obviously not be favored, if employ in our today's world. If organizations and businesses, who frequently be given special treatment under the law, were swiftly make equivalent, the prior injustices would thus become clear. Rawls campaigned for making a level playing field. This would not eradicate completion - on the reverse, there would be strong contest. When persons begin from the same position, with no advantages based on stature, class or race, these disparities can become an advantage to their individuality, in a just justice structure. The instant an "exterior opinion" is place into the works regarding one of these differences, the structure breaks away.

Rawls' ideas of justice are dichotomized into the distinction between moral and legal concepts, individual as opposed to societal structures of justice. The autonomy of the individual's inherent rights is preserved through the auspices of the legal system and group dynamics of the society. Justice is realized in a social order in which there prevails recognition of the ability of the individual to reason. The final criterion of action is the test of whether or not the principle employed is acceptable as a *universal principle* for society (Follesdal 316). The establishment of a system of distribution of justice within a society is necessary to enforce legal justice for the sole purpose of allowing the individual to live within the conditions of the inherent moral criterion and the individual's interpretation of such. The purpose of the system of justice is to guarantee the realization of moral justice for the individual.

Rawls theory of justice goes beyond defining the concept of justice to describing the different types of associations of individuals. The theory on justice that Rawls proposes is appropriate and inclusive of all associations. It is exemplified by the setting of the parameters of the institution of justice within the confines of duties of enforcement, with the individual's maximum opportunity to meet moral obligations and the prohibition of the social institutions to inhibit that opportunity. The associations of individuals, including family and society, are defined by Rawls in terms of the division of labour and, more generally, the application of principles of rights and justice within this institution (Munoz-Darde 335). The object of political theory, as presented by Rawls, is to define social justice and the principles that apply to a set of major institutions, and then to explain how they fit together (Cohen PG). "The legal protection of freedom of thought and liberty of conscience, competitive markets, private property in the means of production, and the monogamous family are examples of major social institutions" (Rawls 7). The book delineates the main institutions of society, which in turn define the distribution of rights, duties, the economic opportunities and social conditions in the various sectors of society (Munoz-Darde 339). Justice has as it's seed the moral beliefs of the individual that are seen to 'flower' into the system of societal justice that protects and allows the individual's rights to that moral structure.

RAWLS AND PLATO REVIEWED

Whereas Rawls sets out his theory and then gives examples, Plato theorizes an ideal and then defines the parameters by exploring the exceptions. Both attempt to apply the theory of

justice to society so that it can function within the confines of order and individual moral statutes. It is the art of discernment and the accountability of exceptions that leads Plato to his theories. It is the theory that leads Rawls to his examinations of the exception within his rational scenario. Both Plato and Rawls view justice as a logical and rational outcome of the consideration of the individual's sense of moral parameters. Where Plato bases the construction of the society of the roles that are defined by these moral standards, Rawls constructs his society around the meeting of the individual's right to have these moral standards. The difference is that Rawls perceives society as the means to expounding the standards of justice held by the individual, with the emphasis being the preservation of the standards of the individual over the 'good' of the society. On the other hand Plato view the standards of the individual as being the structure of the society, with the emphasis being on the preservation of the good of the whole, or the society over the individual.

Plato is much more concrete in his establishment of society than is Rawls. He defines the mechanism of justice in terms of specific role definitions. Rawls, on the other hand, defines the mechanisms of justice in terms of the needs of the individual to protect and expand the inherent rights of justice and presents the theory in more abstract terms, for example the "veil of innocence" and "original position".

Both Rawls and Plato seek to establish the role of economy within the definitions of individual and societal concepts of justice. Rawls attends the subject through a discussion of distributive justice based on levels of income and the balancing of individual monetary interests.

The basic theories of Rawls and Plato are compatible in that they are both based on the dichotomy of the individual as opposed to the establishment of the State. The style of presentation is widely different. Rawls' style would be more in keeping with the thoughts of Thrasymachus and the Sophists; to begin with the abstract and construct the practical application around the principles presented. Plato is opposed to this style (as seen in the repudiation of the arguments presented by Thrasymachus) and prefers to begin with the practical application of theory as defined by the exception. Rawls uses straight descriptive technique to present his construct of society and Plato prefers the analogy.

Plato's notion of the model state is only a thought. It is a thought that cannot be practical. State is to serve individuals and not to engulf their individual class. His model state demands sacrifices only. Plato falls short to offer any constitution for his model state. There is no orderly formation of executive, legislature, civil service, political parties' and human rights etc. Platonic concept of justice is not clear and run into with his other concept of his ideal state. The three classes cannot continue separated forever. Plato himself believes that justice is to 'give what is due'. Since every person is a social animal and his refined social reality is in need of interrelations and interference, his argument fall shorts.

Also for Rawls, a line of criticism holds that an ethic of emotional attachment and responsiveness to needs provides the unacknowledged foundation for moral reasoning, action, and propose that the moral agent is not the contractual subject of liberal theory but a relational self (Gilligan PG). The question is centered on the privileging the universal moral duties over responsibilities that derive from local, personal attachments. The alternate approach theorizes that there are two distinct types of moral development, one aimed at autonomy, the other aiming at satisfying community with others, and two types of

responsibility, one which has a commitment to abstract obligations, and the other being responsive to particular relationships.

Many people are opposed to the idea that there is a clear segregation between two types of moral reasoning, in order to stress the importance of universal principles, such as justice and autonomy. It has been pointed out that justifying moral action through special ties may be plausible in easy cases, but that relatedness provides little guidance in difficult moral dilemmas; that principles provide a standard from which to decide when a particular situation makes conflicting concrete demands; that the strength of the impartialist ethical perspective is that it requires us to take account of the needs and suffering of persons with whom we have no immediate connection. It is also emphasized that abstract principles are not fundamentally context-insensitive. By requiring that in matters central to justice people think from the standpoint of others, Rawls does not shift to a transcendent point of no contact with reality; rather he insists on the availability and accessibility of principles to all, in concrete situations" (Munoz-Darde 344).

CONCLUSION

The essential thought that justice is a matter of the crucial makeup of society is also unwrapped to question. To say that the essential formation of society can be made just or fair is to say that it can be calculated both theoretically and in reality. Some social scholars argue that societies are not designed in that regard; they are shaped through the past and by multifaceted webs of relations among persons and institutions. From this standpoint, justice is a trait of precise acts or process inside shared systems, such as legal dealings or political apparatus, and it is ambiguous to broaden the notion of justice to a society as a whole. Any superior description or theorization on social justice would have to take into contemplation the presented circumstances and factors in any society it wants to understudy. This exclusively can give an obvious connotation to social justice. Both throes have their positive aspect and also do have shortcomings.

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