

Plato's city of justice



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Since the time of the existence of organized society, lots of people tried to give one or another definition of society, government, forms of control, and subordination, and the main processes, which took place in public life. Social differentiation, stratification of society, the allocation of the aristocracy, as the basis of one-man rule, all these contributed to a gradual and natural development of monarchical power. The leader, despot, tyrant, king, having almost limitless possibilities in their own states, could conduct any policies and run the affairs according to their choice. What does the science of running the state imply? Lots of people ruminated about this question. The aim of the paper is to analyze 'The Republic' written by Plato and defend the following argument: Plato's city with the most justice is in many ways not a just city at all.

Is Plato's city really just?

Plato's Republic has become one of the most mysterious writings in the philosophy. Thousands of readers and specialists studied it. However, they have produced more debate than clarification. The essence of the work is in the questions what means to lead good life and what good life is. These questions are looked through different prisms. It is well-known that according to Plato a person lives well in case he she knows everything about the end of the life. Plato also stated that a person had to know the real value of things. It is a moral virtue and is a constituent of living art. If a person knows these facts he is a just man. If a person thinks that the greatest achievements in the life are money and wealth he she will be punished in future and will achieve nothing.

Plato started from the fact that there is an ideal state, a perfect specimen, and its multiple repetitions are simple distortion in the real world of things. The Plato's view is expressed in his treatise "The Republic". The main basis of any ideal state is justice. Plato argues that every citizen is given a special class, which is the most suitable to his or her nature, i. e. justice is correspondence of a real thing with its idea. The state is ideal, when each citizen acts in accord with his own essence. Since there are individual differences between people Plato proposes the division of society into several estates: the philosophers - the rulers, warriors - the guardians and craftsmen - manufacturers. The ideal system is when every citizen's interests are identical with the public ones, when personality does not claim for individual self-worth and complete autonomy in actions.

According to Plato, "justice is the principle, cause, and uniting bond of all the other virtues, - one, too, that is essentially of a political character" (Plato, 389 B). Plato believed that only experienced man had to rule the just society - the man who cognized the truth about the end of life and goodness. It is necessary to admit that society was only a certain stage where all morality virtues of the just man were perfectly seen. The ruler of this society can resist the enemies' violence or attacks, and at the same time he can punish the wicked citizens. According to Plato's theory, only just men can possess the highest magistracies in the state, because such people will be respected and laborious. Such people will never commit injustice. Plato worked out an image of the ideal and complete virtue, which had to lead the whole life of the just man. Plato stated that a person has special relations in society and he performs definite social functions. However, the just man is

considered only collectively – the just man is only a part of the Republic.

Plato made a considerable effort in his times and worked out a theory about the perfect state. He tried to persuade people that it is really much better to be just man than unjust man. If a man obeys to all moral rules and laws he will help the state and can gain the reputation of the just man. If a person doesn't want to perform his special social functions and even ignore them, he will be unjust man and will have no possibility to become successful. “

The rulers of the state are the only persons who ought to have the privilege of lying, either at home or abroad; they may be allowed to lie for the good of the state” (Plato, 389 B).

It seems that everything is quite understandable in Republic by Plato.

However, it is possible to admit that this perfect state of the just men was only a tyrannous doctrine, because it didn't consider a man as a personality, but only a part of system. Really, in the modern world people like to be free and independent. They do not like to follow any rules and refuse to have any restrictions. Such position contradicts with the “ just” city created by Plato. Thus, some people had other thoughts and they stated than it was better to be unjust men than just, because such a person was free and independent from society and imposed functions.

Just man vs. unjust man

Plato argued that unjust people had more troubles. The just man and the unjust man do the same way and they want to get more than other people. This trait is considered to be good and natural by the nature. According to

laws, this trait leads to respect equality, because everybody desires the same things - both just men and unjust men.

Of course, it can be mentioned that man cannot be fully just. He is only restricted and constrained by some laws and moral values, which were of great importance for Plato. Plato realized that a person thought he could do unjust things. So, Plato couldn't resign himself with the thought that injustice was more desirable and profitable for men. For example, Aeschylus mentioned that in the end of the life Plato's just man will be "be scourged, tortured, fettered, have his eyes burnt out, and lastly, suffer all manner of evils, and be crucified; and he will know too, that a man should desire not to be, but to appear just" (cited in Bloom 35e).

It can be supposed that just man can be as good at saving money as at stealing them. Just man is something like "a kind of thief". Such men should constrain their inclinations and predilections. Vice versa, the unjust man presents his desires without any embarrassment.

The predestination of the just man is to support friends and relatives, and to hurt enemies. The predestination of the unjust man is to help both friends and enemies.

Plato stated that the just man was one who "was not given to doing wrong" (Bloom, 1991). If the just man is really honest and good, the problem of hurting people (friends or enemies) is the unjust man's business.

Nonetheless, both just and unjust men have no right to hurt people (Burgess, 1901). According to Plato's theory of perfect state, injustice was skill in

deceiving people, leading them into delusion. That is why Plato outlined that just life is really the better and the only art of living.

It is a fact that unjust men are superior in intelligence and character, because the just men are afraid of doing something wrong and they never show their real abilities.

Conclusion

Plato's state and civil society are represented in a single, homogenous, holistic, undifferentiated concept. Plato points out the following forms of government: the royal regime (monarchy), the aristocracy, timocracy, oligarchy, democracy and tyranny. The most right and reasonable, he believes, is aristocracy. Other forms of government are consistent deviations from the ideal state. Aristocracy is a rule of the best, approved by the people. The person, who is reputed to be brave and wise, should have power and rule the state. The basis of this form of government is equality by birth. In Plato's view, a real governor should not seek for power; he is not willing to rule the country and corrects the vices of other people. People, guided by ambition, fame and money are not suitable for this role. The dialogue "Laws" is the last work of Plato. Estate division of citizens is replaced with gradation of property qualification. Along with the recognition of slavery, Plato demonstrates his disdainful attitude towards productive work. Ideal state structure, by Plato, is combining of democracy and monarchy that can't be approved today.

The idealistic and conservative philosophy of Plato was not really helpful to the economic stability and territorial integrity of the state. The aim of the good society is neither freedom, nor economic well-being.

To sum up, it is necessary to mention that philosophy was rather popular in those times and it was a hard-work to works out such theory of perfect state. It is up to everybody to decide whether it is good or bad, but we should appreciate and remember such personalities as Plato and Socrates.