



**Plato's *Republic*:
The Concept of Justice in Its Foundations
An Iranian Voice**

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Introduction

In this article, the author attempts to summarize the main purpose of Plato from the dialogue of *Republic*, his most detailed and most important treatise. For this reason, we are based on the report of the ten books of the dialogue, because it has at least two functions: first, the general framework of the book and the way Plato enters and leaves the various subjects become clear, and, secondly, the relevance and proportion of the various components and subjects, which sometimes seem irrelevant, is illustrated and the main message of Plato becomes more apparent. In addition, this dialogue, as in most of his dialogues, Socrates is in the center of discussion and is the product of the early period of Plato's life, strongly influenced by Socrates.

Search for justice, the main problem of Plato

Contrary to what is customary, it seems that Plato's main impetus for writing this essay, rather than the establishment of a fantasy country or its realization in the external world, was to clarify the nature of justice and injustice and their role in human happiness. Because the Greek title of the book (*politeia*) means "country" or "justice or just man" and putting the title of "*republic*" on it is misleading. Justice is also a traditional translation of the term "*Dikaousyne*", which means the whole virtue; from the social perspective, it means justice, but merely an attribute, it means virtue. In other words, the main subject of this essay is how to benefit from the best advantages of life, but since good life is only possible in society, we must know society. But knowing the society also is based on knowing the nature of man (*psyche*), because if we do not recognize man, we cannot figure out what is good for it and what is bad. In addition, we must also recognize the nature of the "good" so that we can identify good from bad, and in order to fulfill all of these goals we need to be educated first and foremost [8, 8].

Selecting and educating societies' guardians



The first question that comes to mind is why Plato gives importance to the education of the military power of the society or the Guardians? Perhaps the main reason for this is that future politicians and leaders of the society are chosen from among them, not from among other classes of society, such as craftsmen, farmers, etc. [7, 262] accordingly, the Guardians, as advocates of the society, must have both physical strength and spiritual courage. Because they are like guard dogs, who must be harsh to enemies and aliens and gentle and noble to friends and acquaintances [8, 37].

After seeing the characteristics of the Guardians, Plato says: "Now we have to see how we should train those who have the mentioned characteristics and which sciences we should teach them" [1, 937-9].

Plato emphasizes music for spiritual training, and for him the music includes poetry, dance and singing. He believes that the "training" of the soul, with the help of poetry and music, is the most important component of education, because the rhythm and song influence easier and quicker than anything on the bottom of the human soul, so that a spirit which is properly trained will benefit from beauty and harmony and will be honest and good. However, if it is exposed to false education, it becomes mean and abnormal. He says that the ultimate goal of spiritual education is that: one can interest in beauty, and a healthy and strong soul will make the body healthy and temperate [ibid, 973-7].

Plato thinks the guardians of society must be emancipated from imitation and says, if they want to imitate they should imitate the attributes and properties that are necessary for their duty. They must imitate brave, self-controlling and libertarian men, not those who are flatterer and mean. Additionally, women, slaves, cowardly people, maniacs, rowing boats, horses' neighing, bulls' boar, sound of rivers, roar of the sea and lightning should not be imitated [2, 964-6].

Platonic justice

Plato believes that justice is required both for himself and for its effects and results; it is the best thing of happiness. In his view, the source of justice is the adherence to the law, and the nature of it is "the moderation between the best things" and, finally, the just is happier than the oppressor.

So Plato's beginning is justice in society, because he considers the human being to be a social being, and because he sees justice in society as greater and easier to understand than others; in this way he deals with the formation of society based on the need of individuals to each other. He believes that everyone should go to a work that is in line with his character and talent and avoid from a variety of jobs, since the employment of a person in various occupations causes him to do nothing properly. In other words, "people are not equal in terms of taste and talent, and everyone has been made for some work, and only when we come to doing good things and making cheap and effortless labor that everyone has a task to match their talents" [1, 929-30].

Summary of Plato's view of justice and oppression is as follows: "Justice is that everyone should do their work and not interfere with the work of others". In other words, "Everyone should be engaged only in one job; a work that is consistent with his nature and



talent". Also in society, each of the three classes of craftsmen, soldiers and guardians who are solely responsible for their task is just and the society in which such a situation is dominant is a just society". Plato believes that there is no difference between a just society and a just person in terms of justice, but they are similar to each other. Because "the society is just in which all three components – being different each in terms of natural talent - are common in one attribute: each one has its own task, and the just is also one who each of the three components of his soul perform his special task" In his view, "oppression occurs when the tripartite components of the soul begin with each other in an incompatibility and do not pursue their task, but interfere in each other's work, and that part of the soul, which in its nature has not a duty other than subjugation to the dominant component rises up and wants to command the whole spirit. Such a situation that occurs within human soul and the chaos and corruption that results from it must be called oppression, and if it is given the name of unrest, cowardice, ignorance and corruption, it is not without reason".

But one point cannot be denied, and that the justice, in Plato's view, does not mean equality in democratic societies, because he considers possible the unequal rights and freedoms of individuals without the occurrence of oppression [10, 182/1].

Who is the ruler of utopia?

Plato explicitly states: "So long as the government has not come to the hands of the philosophers, the misery of individuals and societies will not end" [1, 1112]. In his view, the misery of societies disappears when the philosophers become king or the kings are truly fond of philosophy. Because the philosopher is the only one who aspires to whole knowledge and to watch the truth [ibid]. In other words, the philosopher loves the true things and loves knowledge and wisdom, not the illusion, and does not see only the fair and beautiful things, but also the justice itself and the beauty itself. In other words, the philosopher can perceive the eternal immutable being unlike others who are wandering in the world of diversity [4, 1084-86].

He argues: "The philosopher must be brought from the position of reflection on intelligible objects to contrive the society". The philosopher also "should work in society, like the painter who decorates the wall. First, he carefully should trim it and then write the desired form of society, and compare what he has written, with an example of justice that can be imagined" [2, 188-9/1].

In Plato's view, "the emergence of the best laws is possible only when the full and absolute power is unified with wisdom and genuine self-control in one individual" [ibid]. He believes that the good king can easily establish the best government in the country [ibid]. Because the wise men must take control of the state and the ignorant be subordinates [ibid]. Plato, in the seventh book of the *Republic*, after the introduction of the allegory of "Cave", concludes that, firstly, contrary to the views of contemporary teachers, the Sophists who suspect that to the young people they teach some knowledge that is not from the beginning in their souls, the power of knowledge is from the beginning in the soul of every human being; secondly, the government is the right of those who meet the "the good" and have come to the light world. In his view, philosophers are the only ones who have



emancipated themselves from the cave of nature and have succeeded in meeting the bright sun of the world of the truths or the idea of "good", and therefore they are responsible for the authority and leadership of the society; they must be obliged to return to the cave of nature and lead the other prisoners of the cave to light [2, 1129-37].

Is Plato's utopia realizable?

In answer to this question, Plato says that we were in fact seeking the cause of justice and oppression, and wanted to introduce a just man and an oppressing man, so that we could find out to which of these two examples we are similar and what is our destiny in terms of happiness and ruthlessness, and we did not intend to prove that those examples can be realized in the world.

The establishment of Plato's utopia is accomplished in three phases: the city of pigs or the healthy city, the luxurious city and the ideal city or the utopia. The origin of the city of pigs is the need of humans to each other, and its people live peacefully and well together. But the origin of creating a luxurious city is the accumulation of wealth, in which all sorts of occupations and professions have been created. In addition, this city focuses on the establishment of the army for expansion. Eventually, an ideal city begins with the early society which was in peace, but gradually the extreme desire for lust and feelings leads to a breakdown of relations based on the peace and tranquility of the primitive commune and the creation of a luxurious and aggressive city and the necessity of the army. As a result, the society become a utopia headed by a philosopher, who disciplines and organizes everyone and implements justice [8, 59-60; 11, 32-6].

What can be summed up is Plato's this expressive phrase: "Maybe that country is a divine example created in heaven so that those who have a keen eye see it and following the laws of that country put in order their intimacy. But it does not matter to them whether such a country is or will be on earth, but they will always follow only the principles and laws that are in place, not from other principles" [2, 11248].

Conclusion and final evaluation

In the description of his utopia, it seems that Plato, influenced by the psychological and biological theories of the time, knew the society and the state as "an individual written in bold" and, in this respect, he did not see any difference between the perfect man and the perfect society. For this reason, he also said that as a perfect human being is the one whose three mental elements – that is, rational, voluntary, and carnal elements – should be balanced by government of the rational element, an ideal society also is one in which the triple classes corresponding to the triple human components should be harmonious and balanced. That is, every class of society, like any element of the human soul, does what it agrees with its nature and ability. The three classes of society in his view were: the class of rulers (of gold) corresponding to the rational element of the soul, the class of soldiers (of silver), similar to the voluntary element of the soul, and finally the lower class of society,



that is, the craftsmen, etc. (of iron and zinc) comparable to the lowest part of the soul, that is, the carnal element. In order to realize such a utopia, he suggested that the philosopher should be ruler of the society or the rulers should find the philosophical spirit and power. In the final assessment of Plato's plan, we must say that the plan has many strengths and weaknesses that are briefly mentioned in the following:

A. Strengths:

1. In defense of Plato's plan and theory, it must be said whether such a utopia can be accomplished externally or cannot be realized at all, at least the virtue of this theory is that it can be viewed as an ideal and divine pattern so that based on it the earthen sample will be founded by eliminating its weaknesses.
2. It seems that Plato's theory of the state that "the state can make possible the human good life and promote and help the worldly human purpose and well-being", is superior to the theory of modern liberalism that recognizes the state purely as an institution whose task is to protect the private property of individuals.

B. Weaknesses:

1. The first objection is the one Aristotle said: "These things and other ones have been assumed illusorily over the course of the ages".
2. It seems that Plato's very intense love of order has caused his state to be free from movement and freedom which is the spirit of art. In other words, in the ideal state of Plato, invention and innovation are forbidden, because the state's intentions are involved in determining what the duty of everyone should be.
3. Platonic communal ownership and his communism undermine the sense of responsibility and the scientific progress and all human abilities, because a society run by one or more people prevents the progress and development of most people. The obvious example of this can be seen in the recent communist systems, which almost all have reached a dead end.
4. Contrary to Plato's view, governance is not a kind of skill and expertise, because, unlike medical science, it is simply not reduced to a science. In other words, the physician guides patient without regard to his/her desires and emotions. But the ruler, instead of guiding and determining the interests of citizen's activities, unlike the patient's different talents, abilities and desires, should provide citizens' interests and allow them the full appearance of all the interests of the various human beings. Of course, for the author, this objection is not strong and completely reasonable.
5. The conclusion of Plato's argument does not come from his premises, because from this fact that the government is a skill and expertise, and people are different in their innate capacities and talents, it cannot be concluded that the rulers should have absolute authority.
6. The most intolerable part of Plato's theory is the division of people into three classes and worse than it is his theory of low-layers children, in other words, to kill them. Let's not forget that the common life among the Guardians has caused a kind of unrestrained life and becoming children helpless; the affection and emotion of the father and mother, as well as the needs of the children to the warmth of the family have been completely ignored. In addition, the problem of marriage with the closest family members and respect for parents has not been properly explained [5, 7, 10].



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