

THEORIES OF JUSTICE AND THE EPISTEMIC FOUNDATIONS OF PLURALISM

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Abstract

The conception of justice as the “first virtue of social institutions” (Rawls, 1971) and the “virtue of soul” (Plato, 1956) puts forth two different points of view in the realm of social-political thought. From one point of view, the demand for objective principles of justice at the institutional level presupposes a particular epistemic framework where universal/objective truth and specific methods to reach it have been given importance. I would delve into arguing that the presuppositions to reach objectivity in the epistemic and the political realm are quite similar. It is the epistemological foundation of Descartes that facilitates the political to seek objectivity in its principles. On the other hand, by proposing justice as the “virtue of soul”, Plato proposes an epistemology that is grounded in his notion of the Good. The individual in these two epistemological and political systems engages with the world from two completely different approaches. In this paper, I will explore the relationship of these epistemic frameworks with their respective theories of justice and consider the scope of pluralism.

Keywords: *Justice, Knowledge, mind-body dualism, Pluralism*

Introduction: the Rawlsian framework of Justice

The conception of justice as “the first virtue of social institutions” and the “virtue of soul” not only sets apart the understanding of justice in social-political thought but also presupposes two fundamentally different epistemological systems. This paper will largely be divided into four sections – first, how Rawls reached an objective principle of justice, second, how his epistemic presuppositions are provided by Cartesian dualism in reaching certain knowledge and how they are founded on similar presuppositions. Third, we would involve finding out a different epistemic and political approach in Plato’s *The Republic*. And, the fourth is the concluding section. The underlying concern of all these three sections would be to understand whether and how these approaches are allowing plural ways of engagement with the world.

One cannot overlook the contribution that John Rawls (1971) has made to modern political thought through the concept of ‘fairness’ as the first virtue of institutions. It epitomizes the very nature of institutions as the bearer of the

responsibility to assure justice in society. Individuals have been understood as agents of obedience or conformity to the principles of justice for their welfare in society. To understand the function and the role of the individual in the Rawlsian framework of justice we need a little introduction to his method of arriving at principles of justice. Rawls is one of the strong advocates of social contract theory. His unique articulation of the contract took the very notion of the social contract to its optimal height. No one but Rawls, from the social contract tradition, proposed that the very basis of the contract has to be fair to arrive at a just principle.

The idea of the contract, for Rawls, is to connect the individual conceptions of welfare/justice with that of the first principle of justice through a “procedure of construction” (Rawls 1980: p. 516). The idea of a contract is to arrive at principles of justice for the basic structure of society. For that, the need is to construct a procedure through which every participant with their particular/unique conceptions of good can reach the most reasonable principle of justice. Rawls believes that the procedure of reaching a just principle should be such that even if participants holding different notions of justice will still judge the institution governed by the decided principle as just and no element of arbitrariness is present there (Rawls 1971: p. 5).

Let’s explore a little about how Rawls arrives at a principle of justice¹. To understand it, we need a discussion of Rawls’ notion of person/individual and his notion of morality. To make the procedure just, he assumes that we need to construct a hypothetical mechanism called the “veil of ignorance”. Whatever a person’s identity can be for functioning in the world cannot be retained inside the veil of ignorance and we need to stick to a bare minimum. Different substantial features of human beings as normal persons e.g., position in society, belongingness, intellectual capacity, situatedness, etc. are not imperative for the process of arriving at a principle of justice. Their particular distinct ways of engagement with and in the world are not relevant and are not supposed to be present as a form of knowledge inside the veil of ignorance. Rawls broadens this condition by stating that “I shall even assume that the parties do not know their conceptions of the good or their special psychological propensities” (Rawls 1971: p. 12) inside the veil of ignorance. Rawls (1980) validates this exercise and states that he is following Kantian Constructivism where the idea is that the conception of the person needs to be specified in a “reasonable procedure of

¹ Rawls affirms that to reach an objective principle, the requirement is to follow a procedure or means which is fair/just. So, for Rawls, the means must be just to secure just ends. And, in the Rawlsian framework the underlying understanding is that once the means is secured just, justice will subsequently be achieved without involving any extra effort to make the ends just. For him, the means/process/procedure is imperative for the attainment of principles of justice.

construction” (Rawls 1980: p. 516) wherefrom the principles of justice could be produced.

However, Rawls affirms that an individual inside the veil of ignorance will be a rational person. They will be rational beings with a sense of justice (Rawls 1971: p.12). Further, the parties will have an understanding of political affairs, “principles of economic theory”, “laws of human psychology”, “basis of social organization” and “general information” etc. (Rawls 1971: p. 137). Rawls argues that the restrictions on knowledge of the world and know-how about engagement in the world are of “fundamental importance” for a definite theory of justice. Thus, the veil of ignorance is the only viable way to arrive at an objective or universal principle of justice. Individuals with their rational capacity, isolated from the concrete knowledge of the world, would be able to reach just principles.

Through these conditions, individuals will be deciding the principles of justice inside the veil of ignorance. Rawls defines rationality inside the veil of ignorance in a narrow sense. He states that “the concept of rationality must be interpreted as far as possible in the narrow sense, standard in economic theory, of taking the most effective means to given ends” (1971: p. 14). To decide about the fundamental nature of society, people need to be capable of finding out what is the most reasonable or effective way for a universal principle of justice. Rawls gives us certain hints to understand what might be considered the most effective. He states that the rational persons inside the veil of ignorance will be inclined to choose “a wider to a narrower liberty and opportunity, and a greater rather than a smaller share of wealth and income” (Rawls 1971: p. 396). A person there needs to function with the reasoning of accumulating liberty and wealth as much as possible.

Apart from the discussion of the person and rationality, Rawls talks about a thin notion of good. Rawls tries to define it by stating that “thus something’s being good is it’s having the properties that it is rational to want in things of its kind, plus further elaborations depending on the case” (Rawls 1971: p. 405). Rawls puts forth the understanding of “Goodness as rationality” whereby good is being understood in terms of something rational to have or want in conduct or person. Rawls situates goodness within the framework of rationality.² He locates this kind of understanding in Kant and states that “Kantian constructivism holds that moral objectivity is to be understood in

² Rawls maintains his notion of the thin theory of good inside the veil of ignorance. But he also talks about a full theory of good that will apply once we have the principles of justice and right. And, he believes that this thin theory of good needs to be developed into a full theory of good (Rawls 1971: p. 435). Thus, here, I am sticking to the thin theory of good by assuming that the full theory will not radically differ from the present one.

terms of *suitably constructed social point of view* that all can accept” (Rawls 1980: 519).³ So, universal moral principles need to be first, rational and second, crafted/constructed in such a way that it can accommodate plural notions of morality. Rawls’ notion of morality can be understood in this way – an action or person can be considered as good if it meets what is rational to want in them. Human virtues like kindness, being courageous, truthful, honesty, being righteous or just etc. can be seen as good if these virtues are rational to want in a person. Whether being a kind person is a “good thing” or not depends on whether being kind is the rational thing to expect in a person or not (Rawls 1971: p. 397). That too needs to be assessed within the “more than less” kind of rationality.

From this “impartial atmosphere”, Rawls argues that the participants in the original position will choose a principle of equal share as no one will rationally agree to less than the other. And, no one can propose a plan advantageous only for him/her and cannot express a distinct concern because they lack any substantial information about themselves. Inside the veil of ignorance, with the rationality of accumulating more than less, the “mutually disinterested”⁴ person with a sense of justice, thus, will unanimously arrive at the two principles of justice.⁵ Amartya Sen (2009) notifies that Rawls has not provided sufficient reasons as to why only the specific principle of justice will be reached and no other alternative fair principle of justice. He overlooks and limits the possibility of plural conceptions of justice.

Once the principles are there, individuals need not reflect on any alternative way to be just in society and strictly conform to the principles as they unanimously believe that the very procedure to reach these principles is fair and just. The underlying idea is that if the institution is framed through objectively just policies, compliance with it is necessary, and they have no reason not to do so. Hence, people also become just in their daily affairs. In this procedural form of justice if the procedure (means) is just it is presumed that the outcome (ends) will be just. Objectively just principles through a just procedure will suffice to design the entire structure of institutions as just.

³ Italics are mine.

⁴ Rawls makes a special assumption about human nature that inside the veil of ignorance people will be mutually disinterested in each other. He even calls it ‘restricted altruism’. The idea is that people will be least concerned about the other. Or, it can be said that Rawls believes that rationality provides us with the capacity to validate our conceptions, thus considering others’ concerns for erecting a universal principle is not necessary.

⁵ The two principles of justice namely the Liberty Principle and the Difference Principle. The former is concerned with equal distribution of Liberty and primary goods among every member of society and the latter is about how economic inequality can be addressed in society and income opportunities should be equally available to all.

In principle, people, individually, are not required to strive to become kind, honest, truthful, just,⁶ selfless, and courageous in their daily lives. What they essentially need is to be in strict compliance or conformity to the principles of justice and that is all human society needs for preserving justice in society. Justice has been understood as compliance with an objective just principle, leaving less or we can say no scope for any alternative way an individual can be unbiased, fair or just. Plural ways of engaging or understanding the world and plural reasons for justice have been cast away. Systematically Rawls diminishes the scope to be just in plural ways. It restricts the individual in such a way that the individual cannot deviate from the intended track.

As a dominant understanding of justice, this notion of justice is reflected in present society and our mode of being. For example, the State never expects or asks an individual to be a kind or honest person.⁷ It only requires us to comply with the State policies/laws/regulations etc. An individual's being greedy or corrupt internally is not problematic for the Rawlsian framework of justice till the point the individual is conforming to the established principles of the institution. A person who functions on the rationality of 'more than less' and accumulation of more primary goods as a method of survival, illegal income or being corrupt with impunity, hardly seems to be problematic for him/her. This way of functioning broadens the prospects of living a better life. Reports like "the world's richest 1% own 43% of all global financial assets"⁸ and "the top 1 per cent (among the 30% Indians who own more than 90% of the total wealth) own nearly 40.6 per cent of the total wealth in India"⁹ exemplifies the level of accumulation in our world. The financial scams, not only in India but throughout the globe that come out are among the characteristics of this way of functioning. Theoretically, the dual nature i.e., one in private, one in public, of being has not been seen as problematic in this Rawlsian understanding of justice. This approach to justice not only diminishes the scope of plural ways of understanding justice but also simultaneously seeks to establish this mode of functioning universally.

⁶ Just not in the sense of how Rawls has affirmed it but in other alternative ways of being just e.g., showing courage against injustice can also be counted as a way of being just.

⁷ In the present context it seems that the task of inculcating values like kindness or honesty is left to religion. The modern States consider it unnecessary.

⁸ Report by Oxfam International titled "Inequality Inc.: How corporate power divides our world and the need for a new era of public action" (2024) accessed through <https://oi-files-d8-prod.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2024-01/Davos%202024%20Report-%20English.pdf>.

⁹ Report by Oxfam India titled "Survival of the Richest: The India Story" (2023) accessed through https://d1ns4ht6ytuzzo.cloudfront.net/oxfamdata/oxfamdatapublic/2023-01/India%20Supplement%202023_digital.pdf?kz3wav0jbhJdvkJ.fK1rj1k1_5ap9FhQ.

Descartes's Dualism: Rawlsian presuppositions

Instead of focusing on the implications of this liberal notion of justice that Rawls puts forth, we shall dig deeper to understand the foundation of the justifications for this kind of approach. We can trace the idea of objectivity that only our rationality can provide and subsequently, the presuppositions to reach objective knowledge in the philosophy of Descartes. Rawls has deployed a method where to be impartial/fair individuals need to detach themselves from the world. In this section, we will delve into Descartes's framework to reach certainty in knowledge i.e., objectivity in the realm of knowledge.¹⁰

In his classic text *Meditations on First Philosophy*,¹¹ the objective of Descartes was to reach knowledge which is having certainty like it is having in mathematical knowledge. And, to arrive at that kind of knowledge Descartes deployed the method of scepticism. Descartes not only doubts the existence of the world and his *self* but he is doubtful about any notion of existence as if it is a delusion. In the second *Meditation*, he establishes one thing; that even if one can doubt everything, one cannot doubt the very act of doubting. Thus, he concludes that the very act of doubting/thinking affirms one's existence – “*I am thinking, therefore I exist*”. Proceeding further, in analyzing this “I” in “I am thinking” which is self-validating, Descartes found that this “I” contains ‘*ideas*’ about different things like substance, number, duration etc. But it also contains certain ideas which cannot be created by this “I” like ideas of infinite or omniscience. So, Descartes asserts that something exists outside of this “I” and that is God who has created ideas like omniscience, infinite etc. in us. Taking one step ahead, Descartes makes a distinction between *intellection* and *imagination* and defines imagination as “nothing other than a certain application of the knowing faculty (i.e., “I”) to a body intimately present to that faculty, and therefore existing” (*Meditations*, p. 51).¹² Apart from the existence of “I” and God, Descartes approves of the existence of the body, closely associated with “I” and it represents material quality like the extension. The “I” which, for Descartes, is the mind only is not dependent on the body for its existence and for understanding things as well. For *distinct* and *clear* knowledge of anything in the world, the mind “turns itself some way towards itself”, on the other hand, in the case of imagination “it turns itself towards the body” (*Meditations*, p. 52).

¹⁰ Whereas Rawls was trying to reach objectivity at the political or moral level.

¹¹ I have consulted the translation by Michael Moriarty for Descartes' *Meditation on First Philosophy* (1641). From now on I will only use *Meditations* for this reference - Descartes, Rene. (1641). *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in *Oxford World Classics: Meditations on First Philosophy – with selection from the Objections and Replies* (2008), trans. Michael Moriarty, New York: Oxford University Press.

¹² Bracketing is mine

Descartes states that the body “in so far as it is only an extended thing and not a thinking thing, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it” (*Meditations*, p. 55). So, the “I” in “*I am thinking, therefore I am*” refers to the mind or reason alone and the body is something which “I” is associated with. Afterwards, Descartes states that “true knowledge of these belongs to the mind alone, but not to the composite (mind-body) entity”¹³ (*Meditations*, p. 58). And, the body always produces “obscure” and “confused” (*Meditations*, pp. 56-57) knowledge, hence, problematic for getting certain knowledge. This establishes for Descartes that certain knowledge is possible only by the mind alone.

The above discussion presents before us, that to arrive at objective knowledge, we may have to ignore certain aspects of ourselves which prevent us from reaching to truth. The body is something which prevents us from reaching certain knowledge. For Descartes, knowledge arising out of the mind-body union is *obscure* and it is the body that contaminates the process of getting accurate knowledge. Descartes in this process of reaching epistemic certainty not only discards the role of the body but also diminishes any possibility of matter to contribute in seeking truth. Body and Matter or World both share the same quality i.e., extension, and therefore, they have no role in acquiring objective truth. The body is something which situates us in the world, allowing us to engage with the world. Separation of mind from the body also implies a separation of mind from the world. The separation allows the mind to work/function independently and makes it possible to construct the world independently, objectively and impartially.¹⁴ Thus, the very presence of the body itself is being seen as something which lays the ground for difference/plurality of understanding as opposed to objectivity, to be there. By the very logic of this duality, Descartes removes the scope of pluralism and establishes objectivity in the sphere of knowledge.

Independence of the mind either to reach certainty in knowledge (Descartes) or to reach objective principles of justice (Rawls) has faced problems either in the form of body or in the form of body politic. In both cases, the body or situatedness of the body in the world has been seen as something irrelevant to the exercise at hand. A rational person, as a self-validating subject, negates external elements, either body or situatedness of the body in the world, to have any role in any sort of intellectual exercise whether it is to find out an objective truth or the principle of justice. In both cases by ignoring one aspect i.e., body, too much emphasis has been given to the other i.e., mind/reason. It can be argued that though both Descartes and Rawls follow similar

¹³ Bracketing is mine

¹⁴ Impartially in the sense that the world/matter cannot influence the “I” from outside and make knowledge obscure.

presuppositions to reach objectivity in the epistemic and the political sphere respectively, Rawls can take this approach forward in the political realm only because Descartes has provided the understanding of the very possibility of it. The epistemic criterion of truth is decisive for the method to be followed in politics. The understanding of what constitutes knowledge sets the method to be followed in the domain of ethics and politics. The conception of a person detached from the world would have not been possible had Descartes not divided it into two – mind and body/matter/world. Thus, the whole agenda of bringing the idea of a “veil of ignorance” is to reach objective principles by casting away the body politic. Rawls considers the body politic as irrelevant to the task at hand. Rawls relies on reason only to arrive at just principles in politics and is similar to Descartes who emphasizes the “I” which is mind only and not the composite of mind-body to arrive at certain knowledge.

Justice in *The Republic*: An alternative way of engagement

Though the present discourse is largely dominated by this modern-liberal-rational worldview, it is not the case that there is no alternative way to address this issue in the history of Western political thought. The conception of justice that Plato advocated in *The Republic*¹⁵ invites a deeper engagement to observe the alternative. In this section, we will try to understand Plato’s take on justice and how it can provide a better framework of justice.

The primary inquiry in *The Republic* is regarding the nature and definition of justice. In sharp contrast to Rawls, Plato understands justice as the virtue of the human soul and not of the institution or something related to the regulative principles of the institutions. The locus of justice is the human soul; something which one cannot treat as external to one’s being but essentially internal to one’s being. Externality of justice can be understood in terms of acts which conform to the principle of justice which never requires a person to preserve justice in his/her being. Plato explains how a person can be internally just.

Plato makes an analogy between the individual and the State. He states that the individual soul is divided into three parts i.e., Wisdom, Spirit or Courage, and Appetitive part and similarly the State institution also represents three virtues i.e., Wisdom, Courage and Temperance (*The Republic*: pp. 262-281). In the context of a just state, wisdom part represents the highest guardians of the city, courage is the preservative part represented by soldiers, temperance, not like other parts, is “a kind of good orderand mastery of certain pleasures and desires” and “it is stretched right

¹⁵ I will be using translation of Plato’s *The Republic* by W.H.D Rouse (1956).

through the whole city bringing all the strings into concord” (*The Republic*: p. 266). And, Plato states that “here is a thing which makes it possible for the other to be there at all, and it preserves them there as long as it is in them” and that is justice which prevails in every part (*The Republic*: p. 270). Justice, here, has been understood as doing one’s duty and by following that State will be preserving harmony between each part of the institution. Temperance has not been exclusively located in any part but applied to all the parts of the soul. Harmony among the three parts of the State is the condition for qualifying a State as just. Doing one’s duty has a larger meaning for Plato. It emphasizes the realization of one’s duty and performing it.

Plato, then, states that “... a just man then will not differ from the just city” (*The Republic*: p.272). And, by asserting the relation between the individual and the State, he states that “we must remember then that each one will be doing his own business, and will be just, when each part of him will be doing its own business in him” (*The Republic*: p. 281). Subsequently, Plato asserts that the reason part should rule as it has wisdom and “forethought for the whole soul” (*The Republic*: p. 282). The courage part and the appetitive part will show temperance by submitting their will to reason. Regarding the spirit part, Plato talked about proper education so that mastery over an individual’s aptitude can be identified. Temperance has been understood as mastery over oneself and that applies to all three parts of the soul. Plato states that we may consider a soul temperate “whenever the ruler and the two ruled are of one mind and agree that the reasoning part ought to rule” (*The Republic*: p. 282). Justice, within the individual soul, is again understood similarly to the institution. It is doing one’s duty properly and not being intrusive in another’s job. That’s the only way to maintain harmony between the parts of the soul. A harmonious soul has been understood as the underlying condition of justice. And, this harmony between each part of the soul enables a person to be just and to act justly. A person’s doing will be followed by a person’s being and not vice-versa.¹⁶ Plato also describes what injustice is and that is relational with the notion of justice. And he states

“Surely it must be faction among these three, and meddling in many businesses, and meddling in others’ business, and revolt of one part of the soul against the whole in order that this part may rule in the soul though it is not proper for it to do so,..” (*The Republic*: p. 284-285).

So, for Plato injustice is not the failure to conform to certain objective rules or to fail to act in certain predetermined ways, for him it indicates a state of being where an

¹⁶ For a detail discussion on harmonious soul see Dahl (1991).

individual is not in a position to perform just action in society. Being unjust reflects that one has deviated from the virtues of the soul. He proposes the understanding that-

“to implant justice is to settle the parts of the soul so as to rule and be ruled together according to nature; to implant injustice is to settle things so that one part rules and one part is ruled one by another contrary to nature?”
(*The Republic*: p. 285)

Injustice has been understood as deprivation of the virtues of the soul and not performing one's duty and that applies to both levels i.e., individual and institution. However, the primary concern for establishing justice in society or State is to make sure that an individual is internally just. If an individual cannot maintain or preserve internal harmony, justice cannot be reflected in the larger body. Here, Plato does not consider reason alone or any other part independently would be able to preserve justice in one's being or in the State. Harmony among each part, their togetherness, will establish and preserve a just soul and a just State i.e., microcosm and macrocosm reflecting one another.

The implication of this notion of justice can be understood through the crisis that the present society is facing. Connecting the example in the context of Rawlsian justice, the problem of corruption can only be addressed effectively if and only if one's being and doing are consistent with each other. Accumulation of wealth in the hands of few which creates huge inequality in our society can be challenged with an alternative rationality, not the resource-oriented one. Individual needs to be more empathetic, not only a rule-follower, in addressing issues of injustice in society. Plato provides us with the ground where a person's 'doing' will never conflict with one's 'being' as the former follows from the latter and their being just is not confined to rule-following like in Rawls.

One question remains – how to maintain this harmonious state of being? In response to this question, Plato brings in the discussion of epistemology and his metaphysics for an enriched understanding of justice. In contemporary times, justice has largely been seen as solely a political virtue and the discussion of it is only relevant in debates on the functionary of the State. Like, for Rawls, identifying a conception of justice is “not primarily an epistemological problem” (Rawls 1980: 519). However, Plato believed that an understanding of justice completely devoid of the notion of truth is problematic. One cannot preserve the harmony of the soul by not knowing things as it is or thing-it-itself, the *forms*. Making a distinction between a person who is awake and a person who is dreaming, he states that knowledge of things without the knowledge of things-in-itself makes a person a dreamer. One who can understand the

distinction between things e.g., beautiful things, and things-it-itself e.g., beauty itself, and knows how things partake in things-in-itself is a man of knowledge.

To have a better understanding, he makes a distinction between “ignorance”, “opinion” and “knowledge” (*The Republic*: pp, 323-324). Knowledge belongs to what is, the real; ignorance belongs to what is not, the unreal and opinion is “darker than knowledge and brighter than ignorance” (*The Republic*: p. 324). Further, “understanding” is something which rests between opinion and knowledge (*The Republic*: p.365). And, then he describes the journey of a man from ignorance to knowledge through The Divided Line. Each part, “conjecture”, “belief” (the realm of sensible or *becoming*) “understanding”, and “exercise of reason” (in the realm of intelligible or *being*) participates in a certain proportion to acquire different degrees of reality. Through the Divided Line, Plato shows us the journey from appearances to the truth.

But, with the help of the cave allegory, Plato describes that the things visible in the world are not visible by themselves. They are visible because the Sun has provided visibility to our sight and thus, we can see particular things in the world. In the case of *forms* or *ideals* in the world of intelligible like perfect beauty, perfect justice etc. Plato conditions it on the knowledge of the *Highest of Forms* i.e., the form of Good. He states that –

“if you do not know it, you know it will not be of any advantage to us to understand all the rest perfectly without this model, just as it is no advantage to possess anything without the good” (*The Republic*: p.355).

The *form Good*, exactly like the sun, makes knowledge of the known possible. According to Cornford (1918) this notion of Good should not be understood as moral goodness only but it pervades “throughout all Nature” and “the knowledge of the Good, on which well-being depends, is now to include an understanding of the moral and the physical order of the whole universe” (Cornford 1918: p. 207). Knowledge and truth may be “goodlike” but they are not *the Good*. The *form Good* is not only the cause of “becoming known” it is the “cause that knowledge exists and the state of knowledge, although good is not itself a state of knowledge but something transcending far beyond it in dignity and power” (*The Republic*: p. 361).

On the relation between becoming (sensible) and being (intelligible), Plato states that – “what being is to becoming, that exercise of reason is to opinion, and what exercise of reason to opinion, that science is to belief and, understanding to conjecture” (*The Republic*: p.392). This compels us to engage in knowing the truth only through a dialectic method. The cave allegory also indicates the same where the free prisoner

getting the knowledge of images/shadows turns towards the Sun to realize the source of knowledge and then he goes back to the cave and understands the distinction between what is real and unreal. Knowledge of objects is not sufficient but in addition to that the knowledge of the distinction between real and unreal is what makes a person a knower. It requires us to engage with the world with a hypothesis, move forward towards that which is not hypothetical (the first principle) then turn back and move downward to a conclusion. The method itself lays the ground of the actualization of the *ideals* or *forms* in the society which presupposes that they are related to each other. And, each individual as an agent of justice needs to strive for the “instantiation” of the forms in society, thus making it possible to actualize the *ideal State*.¹⁷

Conclusion

The above discussion represents before us that to be a just person in Plato’s framework individual must seek the truth in relation to the *form Good*, which will help the parts of the soul to perform their duty in the proper sense leading to maintaining a harmony between all the parts of the soul. Once an individual can preserve a harmonious state of being within himself/herself, then the individual will be able to realize and perform his/her duty in society. The effort to engage in the dialectic to know the forms as closely as possible and instantiate them in society will make him fulfil his/her duty in the best possible way. Thus, as an agent of justice, each individual has to engage in the dialectic method to make the State a just State. According to Plato, a just person -

“...would be telling us we ought to do and say what will make our inside man completely master of the whole man, and give him charge over the many-headed monster, like a farmer, cherishing and tending the cultivated plants, but preventing the weeds from growing; he must make an ally of the lion’s nature, and care for all the creatures alike, making them friendly to each other and to himself, and so he will nourish the whole” (*The Republic*: p. 462).

The just individual is not required to separate the “mind” from the “body” or “world”, instead, one needs to gain mastery over the “whole man” which Descartes might identify as a combination of mind and matter. The separation will prevent establishing a concord between different parts of the soul which is necessary as the *ruler* (reason) and the two *ruled* (spirit and appetitive part) must not be in faction for preserving justice within the individual. If reason has to demonstrate that it has the upper hand in getting the truth, which is the case in Plato, it is supposed to do it together with the

¹⁷ See Dahl (1991) for a detailed discussion on instantiation.

other parts i.e., the body, and not by rejecting the other as having any value. The distinction between “sensible” and “intelligible” might seem to provide a ground for similarity between the epistemic frameworks of Plato and Descartes. In opposition, Descartes completely discards the knowledge of the sense as it prevents the mind from reaching objective truth. Plato acknowledges it by considering the knowledge of sensible as having a preliminary grasp of truth, better than ignorance. Concerning method, the rational mind, detached from the body and the cosmos, independently decides truth and also validates it which lays the ground for a homogenous understanding of the self, the world and the relation between them. On the other hand, the dialectic method invites the agent to engage with the world of senses, through the knowledge of the particulars the agent emanates to the world of intelligible; having the knowledge of forms descends to the world of senses and makes the distinction between real and unreal. The dialectic method which Plato considers the highest subject of study provides the individual with the scope to engage with the world from one’s capacity and to know the relation between ideals and particulars from his/her way of engagement allowing plural engagements. That does not mean that it produces a relativistic framework where everyone’s truth is relative to the circumstances. It provides us with a ground to engage in the search for truth, but as the self-validating option is unavailable here, it requires us to understand the dialectic relationship that one’s truth has with the form of truth. Understanding the relationship between unity (forms) and plurality (particulars) is the underlying concern of the dialectic.

In the Rawlsian framework, an individual is not required to know the relation between politics, epistemology and metaphysics. It can establish an objective principle of justice riding on the conception of “I” having no relation to the body and body politic. It requires the individual to become a passive agent of justice by strictly conforming to the principle arrived at through a fair procedure. It completely negates any concern for the “other”, who might not be able to conform.¹⁸The implication of that can be seen in his *The Law of Peoples* (1999) where the best way to deal with the “non-liberal” nations is either by imposing sanctions or by waging just war. On the other hand, Plato has never defined the highest form, the *form Good*, making the possibility for each distinct engagement with it through the dialectic. Dialectical engagement, in opposition to conformity to principles, has been emphasized to preserve justice in society. It discards any possibility of upholding the dual nature of being and by that, formulates the separation of being and doing redundant. Being just has been understood as a precondition for doing just, making another dichotomy of “private” and “public” absurd. Plato’s notion of justice as the first virtue of the

¹⁸ See Nussbaum (2006) pp. 96-156 for a detailed account of how it ignores the “other”.

individual soul resists all the ramifications that modern epistemology has given rise to from the homogenization of the politic, discord between theory and practice, discord between being and doing, to the separation of different disciplines as a better way of existence.

This paper is an attempt to showcase an alternative way of existence where the integrity of the self could be firmly established and plural engagements/experiments with the world could be recognized.

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Online Resources

- Report by Oxfam International titled “Inequality Inc.: How corporate power divides our world and the need for a new era of public action” (2024) accessed through <https://oi-files-d8-prod.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2024-01/Davos%202024%20Report-%20English.pdf>.
- Report by Oxfam India titled “Survival of the Richest: The India Story” (2023) accessed through https://d1ns4ht6ytuzzo.cloudfront.net/oxfamdata/oxfamdatapublic/2023-01/India%20Supplement%202023_digital.pdf?kz3wav0jbhJdvkJ.fK1rj1k1_5ap9FhQ.