



Philosophy Today
2021, Vol. 2 | Issue-2
<https://philosophytoday.in>

The Four Cardinal Virtues in the midst of the Pandemic

Wandashisha Mary Nongbri¹

Abstract:

Amidst of the pandemic, questions have emerged regarding the working of the State and also the response of the citizens of the country to the pandemic. This article aims to highlight the role of Philosophy particularly Ethics emphasizing on the Concept of Cardinal Virtues (wisdom, courage, temperance and justice) that was greatly expounded in the Greek city state. In one way or the other every human being needs a sense of direction in his life amidst troubles. The right ingredients of virtue will help a person in providing a sense of direction to him. The concept of virtue as excellence of any kind means a human's excellence that belongs to man. The excellence that belongs to human being will be seen as playing a pivotal role in directing the state including the leader and also the citizens. Guiding a person to do what is right in a particular action. In the midst of fear, tension and anxiety the cardinal virtues as such can become a ground of how human being can reshape and rethink about his life in a crisis and also post the pandemic. The moral life of the individual, that is his relationship with the state and the other individual in the society plays a very important role.

Keywords: virtues, cardinal virtue, fear, wisdom, courage, temperance and justice.

¹ Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy, N.E.H.U.-Shillong
wandashishanongbri77@gmail.com

Introduction:

In his book, Republic IV, Plato talks about a state in which every man is expected to be doing his own work and sharing with the rest. The happiness resides not in this or that class, but in the State as a whole. For in his dialogue, Socrates states that the greatest happiness of the individual is certainly to be found in a life of virtue and goodness. For Socrates the notion of the state to be perfect will contain all the four virtues - Wisdom, Courage, Temperance and Justice. The relationship of the citizens in the state determines the happiness of the state. So, it can be said that in the midst of crisis every citizen of the state, be it the leader or the ruled, have their own duty and responsibilities; a state where every man is expected to do his own work and sharing with the rest. Furthermore, Socrates suggests we 'reflect' that the legislator was believed to be guardians and not holiday - makers. The four Cardinal virtue of Plato was introduced in the Greek city state to ensure justice and how these

four virtues as such will find its place among different citizens of the state.

The word virtue was used for excellence of any kind. But generally, the excellence referred to is an excellence belonging to man, so that the virtue may be described as the forms of human excellence. In ethics, 'Virtue' is used with two somewhat different meanings. A virtue is a quality of character a disposition to do what is right in a particular direction; a virtue is also a habit of action corresponding to the quality of character or disposition.

In Plato's Republic, there is found to be the outstanding exposition of the Greek doctrine of the four cardinal virtues. The word 'cardinal' is derivative of the Latin word 'cardo', meaning a hinge² and the cardinal virtues are the virtues by which the moral life is supported, as a door is supported by its hinges. The four cardinal virtues are: Wisdom, Courage, Temperance, and Justice.

In the midst of the pandemic, ethics is one of the most important fields of study which gives both the state and the man a direction. The

² Harper, Douglas." cardinal ". Online Etymology Dictionary.

concept of Virtue can be seen as something which supports man morally. The four cardinal virtues from Wisdom to Justice can play a bigger role in enlightening a man on how to live and adapt in a society during a Pandemic or in any situation.

However, the cardinal virtues in this study will be like the lamp that will give a sense of direction to the citizens as well as the guardian of the state. In every state as such every person is bound by one ethic or another; by one moral act or another moral act; the role of the virtue speaks not just to the Ruler or the Ruled but the state in its entirety. During any crisis the most important thing that can be highlighted is the Unity that should be there in a state. Where there is a mutual responsibility among all the classes of citizens and therefore Virtue is able to act as the guiding role for both citizens and the state to function for the happiness of the society. The four cardinal virtues in this study are the guiding steps as to how to deal with the crises wisely and courageously with the right mindset in order to ensure that everybody in the

states grows towards developing their personality.

The four cardinal virtues and its role:

The first cardinal virtue is Wisdom. Socrates emphasizes on the wisdom of the one who leads the states on account of Politics³. In the context of the situation, the virtue of Wisdom rightly applies to all the leaders of a state because they are the instructor, the guardian and the one who will take the leap. Politics plays a very important role in strengthening the society and in leading it into a right direction. The Greek conception of the wise man seems generally to have put emphasis on theoretic and synthetic ability. Naturally, Wisdom is the ability of being prudent. It implies that a leader as such should be a man of direction; a person who takes decision determining in line for the betterment of the entire society. The virtue of Wisdom gives a direction to the state on how to perform wisely during a situation which involves acting both theoretically and practically. Wisdom becomes the ability of an individual to act wisely in the crisis of any situation. Every

³ Origin from the Greek word polis which means city

righteous man will not think of the unreasonable but he will try to reflect the situation and to provide utmost safeguard and protection in the State. The condition of the state or the country reflects the wisdom of the Guardian. Wisdom guides not just the leaders of the state but also the citizens of the state. In Plato's Book IV, Socrates and his companions conclude their discussion concerning the lifestyle of the Guardian. If the city as a whole is happy then individuals are happy.

The second cardinal virtue is Courage. The concept of courage has not been fully defined by Plato neither was a satisfactory conclusion reached. However, many definitions of courage have been offered. For instance, "... a man willing to remain at his post and to defend himself against the enemy without running away..."⁴ or "... knowledge of the grounds of fear and hope..."⁵. Courage helps to set a mindset in the individual that running out of the situation or being ignorant is not an act of the courage's but perseverance in the midst of obstacles is what will help us endure for long in the midst of the situation. Courage

should not be understood as any kind of bold action; the implication here is a balance between moral, physical and what I would term as the emotional courage. Moral courage should be distinguished from physical Courage and also emotional courage. To endure the pain in the midst of a situation - physical, moral and emotional courage could encourage a person to live his or her life in any tragedy. Courage therefore gives the inspiration to every individual in a pandemic.

In the Republic, Plato describes courage as a sort of perseverance - "preservation of the belief that has been inculcated by the law through education about what things and sort of things are to be feared". Plato explains this perseverance as being able to preserve through all emotions like suffering, pleasure and fear. The virtue of Courage plays an important role amidst the fear of death; the fear of losing our near ones or other fears. Emotional courage guides an individual to preserve in these situations. Courage is the ability of sustaining oneself in the midst of pain and suffering. Nevertheless, courage

⁴ Walton 1986, pp.56-58

⁵ Plato, Cooper & Hutchinson 1997, pp.675-86

doesn't imply the endurance of pain of all types. Certain pain are not worthy but what is meant as a phase of both the good and the bad; the happiness and suffering. True courage therefore helps a person to overcome fear and to outshine the situation.

The third cardinal virtue is Temperance and is defined as "moderation in action, thought or feeling restraint." For Plato, self-mastery is more than the mere abstention from certain form of physical pleasure. Temperance does not merely restrain our passion and desires but it takes from reasons guidance as to how far these desires should be satisfied. According to the Greeks, the pleasure of excitement governed by reason prevents one from being carried away by excitement. This was the virtue highly rated by the Greeks. It is this self-restraint of excitement that will be dealt in this study - having the right mindset; the ability not just to control the situation but the ability to restrain from certain excitement. Often, we have seen that people in the midst of choosing what is right for them usually end up with a wrong choice because often individual chooses something which is excessive

for them. The role of Temperance as such in the Midst of tension is the control of excitement. Every human feeling of excitement may not necessary be an exciting feeling but may have developed out of 'fear' and this is fearful for the human psychic. The virtue of temperance then helps a person to be moderate and to contain his excitement which is the result of fear. Fear creates confusion, anxiety in a person and indeed the Pandemic has created many psychological problems amongst many people. The role of Temperance is therefore of utmost importance in times of crisis.

The fourth cardinal Virtue is Justice. The role of Justice in the midst of the pandemic seems to be of less importance but here the role shifts from individual to the individual's relationship with the society. Justice is distinguished from other cardinal virtues as having a more explicit reference to man's social relation. Wisdom, courage and temperance are primarily virtues of individuals; justice is primarily a virtue of a society. Certain amount of freedom is required for the individual; for justice is 'the power that makes each member of a state to do his own work'. For Plato,

justice is a virtue that establishes rational order, with each part performing its appropriate role and not interfering with the proper functioning of other parts. This surely means freedom from interference. When an individual as such is being given justice, it helps him in his personality development and in this way the individual acts creatively.

The fear and stress as a result of the Pandemic have deprived the people of their development. Freedom and equality are not merely conventions that have been found useful in the development of society; they are in some sense natural and based on the laws of nature. In the midst of tension, everyone citizens of the state needs to be provided so that no one is deprived of anything. The weaker section of the society is seen to be affected more by the pandemic particularly their economic stability as they have been deprived to meet their daily end needs because of certain policies and measures that have been taken with the rising of the pandemic. Hence, Justice in the form of equality should be provided considering such individuals. Every human needs to be treated in a just way or the correct way because in

denying rights for him the person is unable to think rationally, be courageous and also moderate his thoughts and feelings. The relationship with the society is also very important in determining the growth and development of the individual. We have seen that the pandemic has taken away peace and happiness of the people; everybody lacks self-development and in that case, he is unable to think for his betterment.

Conclusion:

Virtue is a quality of character, a disposition to do what is right in a particular direction. A virtue is also a habit of action corresponding to the quality of character or disposition. From the first meaning of virtue, we understand that it is a tendency to do the right thing in a particular direction and this tendency is in correspondence with the habit of performing the right action. Virtue as a disposition helps people to think and reason which actions to perform in different situation because this is the demand of the hour of the day, to perform the right action from time to time.

In the midst of the pandemic people lost not just their lives but their

near and dear one's. Their loss as such is indescribable. The pandemic has created fear, confusion, hopelessness, tragic situation among the people and regaining from it is a difficulty. The four cardinal virtues not only can play a role to revive the moral spirit of the individual during the pandemic but can also be the ground for sustaining the state after the pandemic. There are losses not just of the economy but mentally, the courage that has been lost regaining them again is very important. Wisdom needs to be the guiding step for the Ruler and the rule in the midst of the pandemic and also post the pandemic. A good judgment guided by reason for each individual, it is courageous in that its spirited part is ready, and able to fight for its convictions in the face of fear. The pandemic should not dishearten the spirit but one should be courageous to face the pandemic and also to endure the situation with courage. The role of emotional courage is very important. Emotionally every individual has undergone a tragedy in his life and courage has been depleted. Reviving back that courage is very important. Temperance, the ability to be moderate, or the ability to focus in one's life

without too much cravings is very important. This moderateness as such helps a person to control his emotional excitement which is the result of fear and tension. Justice is what makes an individual active it grooms the individual to have a healthy relationship in the society. If a person is provided with the correct freedom along with proper rights the individual grows automatically. Justice therefore, furnishes an individual.

The concept of Cardinal virtues undertaken in this study therefore seeks to bring in the unity that individual and the guardian shares. Each citizen has got a role to play in any crisis and the cardinal virtue can set the ground for a better state during times of crisis guiding each and every citizen with a proper role of conduct on how to function and live one's own life despite the tragedy. Running away from the problem or being ignorant of the situation is not the solution but finding a way wisely on how to live courageously with moderate perspective will justify our role in the midst of crisis.

References:

1. Jowett, B. (1941). Plato's the republic.
2. Douglas N Walton (1986),
Courage, A philosophical
Investigation.
3. Wayne P. Pomerleau, Western
Theories of Justice, retrieved from
<https://iep.utm.edu/justwest>

