Mains Marathon

Day 43: Plato's influence on the development of virtue theory. Illustrate. (150 words)

22 Aug 2022 | GS Paper 4 | Theoretical Questions

Approach / Explaination / Answer

- Start the answer by briefly explaining what virtue is.
- Discuss Plato's Theory of Virtue
- Conclude Suitably.

Answer:

Virtue can be defined as the moral character of the person carrying out an action, irrespective of ethical duties or the consequences of particular actions.

Plato's theory of virtue follows the Socratic doctrine, he identifies virtue with knowledge. According to him, virtue is teachable, and that humans can learn morality just as they can learn any other subject. Thus, moral beings are not born but made through education.

Plato's Theory of Virtue:

Plato makes a fourfold division of morals and associates them with different parts of the soul.

- The four virtues are wisdom or prudence, valor, temperance, and justice. Plato divides the soul into three parts–rational, spirited, and appetitive.
- Wisdom or prudence is the virtue of reason, the first part of the soul. Wisdom is the directing or measuring virtue.
  - For instance, without it, courage will become a rash impulse, and quiet endurance will degenerate into stony indifference.
- Valour is the virtue of spirit, the second part of the soul. Valor preserves the rational intelligence which is often beset with anxieties in its struggle against pain and pleasure, desire and fear.
- The third part of the soul consists of biological appetites. It is necessary to control their propensity towards excess.
  - Temperance regulates human passions and signifies the submission of non-rational elements to reason.
- Justice refers to the harmonious functioning of the related elements of the soul – the appetitive, the spirited, and the rational.
  - Justice in Plato's sense makes an individual concentrate on his duties; it can be thought of as a sense of duty.

Plato regards virtues as forming a complex unity wherein he accords a privileged position to justice as the overarching virtue. The ideal commonwealth of Plato envisages that every citizen will perform his assigned duties without craving for the (more attractive or powerful) roles of others.