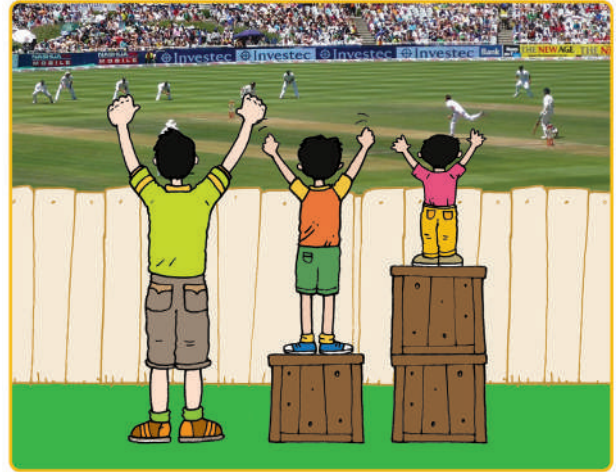


Food for Thought

Equality is not always justice.



Prince Lapio

by Pedro Pablo Sacristán

There was once a very unfair Prince, although he seemed like the perfect Prince: handsome, brave, and intelligent. Prince Lapio gave the impression that no one had ever explained to him the nature of justice. If two people came to him over some dispute, expecting him to resolve the matter, he would decide in favour of whichever one seemed most charming, or most handsome, or whoever had the best-looking sword. Tired of all this, Lapio's father, the King, decided to get a wise man to teach his son about justice. "My wise friend, please take him away," said the King, "and don't bring him back until he's ready to be a just and fair King."

Along their journey, they stopped in a small village. A man of very poor appearance received them and made sure they were well attended. Meanwhile, another man, of similar poor appearance, threw himself to the ground in front of them, begging. A third, who seemed to be a rich man, sent two of his servants to tend to the Prince and the wise man, and provided them with what they needed. The Prince so enjoyed his time there that, on his departure, he presented the villagers with all the gold that he had. Hearing this, the poor man, the beggar, and the rich man, all ran up to the Prince, each one asking for his share. "How will you share it out?" asked the wise man, "the three are very different, and it looks like the one who gives away more gold is the rich man..."

The Prince hesitated. The wise man was right. The rich man had to pay his servants, he was the one who had spent most gold, and he had looked after them well. However, the Prince was starting

to develop a sense of justice, and something told him that his first conclusion on this matter was not sufficient. Finally, the Prince took his gold and made three piles: one very big, another medium sized, and the last one small. In that order he gave them to the poor man, the rich man, and the beggar. Saying his goodbyes, the Prince set off with the wise man, heading back to the palace.

They walked in silence, and when they reached the palace gate, the wise man asked: "Tell me something, young Prince. What does justice mean to you?" "I think justice lies in sharing, taking into account necessities, but also the merits of the individual."

"Is that why you gave the smallest pile to the troublemaking beggar?" asked the wise man, contentedly. "Yes, that's why. I gave the big pile to the poor man who looked after us so well. In him I saw both necessity and merit, since he helped us all he could, despite being poor. The medium pile was for the rich man. Even though he attended to us wonderfully, he really did not have much need for more gold. The small pile I gave to the bothersome beggar because he did nothing worthy of reward. However, given his great need, it was also right to give him something to live on." explained the Prince.

As they were walking along, the Prince commented, "I've learned something new. It is not fair to give the same to all. The fair thing is to share, but you must take people's differing needs into account." The wise man smiled with satisfaction. "I think you'll be a fine King, Prince Lapio", concluded the wise man, embracing the Prince.