

The definition of justice by socrates



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Definition of Justice The Republic examines many different aspects of the human condition. Plato reveals his opinions of Socrates by showing how other humans function and interact with one another. Socrates looks very closely at morality and the most important values people choose to hold. One value Socrates and his colleagues spend a lot of time looking at is the principle of Justice. Multiple definitions of Justice are laid out while Socrates analyzes and questions the validity of them. As each definition begins to form it shows how self-interest shapes the progression of each characters', Cephalus, Polemarchus and Thrasymachus, arguments and helps contribute to the definition of Justice. The first definition of Justice comes through a conversation between Socrates and Cephalus. Socrates and Cephalus are reflecting upon their old age, particularly Cephalus', assessing their lives, when Cephalus states that his wealth " contributes a great deal to not cheating or lying to any man against one's will, and, moreover, to not departing for that other place frightened because one owes some sacrifices to a god or money to a human being. " (Bloom 7).

This comment leads to Socrates questioning Cephalus on his definition of Justice. Socrates asks if Cephalus really believes that justice is simply telling the truth and giving back what one takes. Socrates feels this definition is too simple and questions whether there is an exception where it is mto do these very things sometimes Just and sometimes 7). Socrates continues by suggesting a circumstance where if someone was to borrow weapons from a friend and then that friend demands it back when they are enraged, would it be Just to return the weapons?

Cephalus realizes and accepts the point Socrates makes. Although Cephalus' definition would support the returning the weapons, both Socrates and Cephalus agree that it would in fact not be the right thing to do. That situation would be what is called the exception. Cephalus then leaves the conversation and his son Polemarchus continues to explain what his father began. Polemarchus bases his definition of Justice by referring to Simonides, in which Simonides believes that, " it is just to give to each what is owed" (Bloom 7).

This means that Polemarchus feels that the weapons should not be returned because " friends owe it to friends to do some good and nothing bad. " (Bloom 8). Hence Socrates concludes from Polemarchus that Justice is simply helping your friends and doing harm to your enemies. Socrates then tries to discredit this definition by critiquing Polemarchus' thought processes. He questions Polemarchus by asking how one can tell if someone is good or bad. He also asks how can a just man do harm. Eventually, Polemarchus agrees with Socrates that his definition in fact does not truly define what Justice is.

After Polemarchus settles with the fact that his definition is not good enough Thrasymachus takes his spot and tries to define Justice. Thrasymachus has two main points to his definition. He first claims that Justice is the advantage of the stronger; hence rulers govern on for themselves. Nonetheless Socrates demonstrates that the rulers are at the mercy of their subjects and the people to decide whether or not to follow what the ruler lays out. Socrates says that no kind of knowledge that considers or commands the advantage of the stronger, but rather of what is weaker and ruled by it" (Bloom 20).

Thrasymachus is enraged by this comment, he states that injustice is more profitable than Justice and defends this by claiming that people blame injustice for the fact that they fear it and do not want to suffer from it. This fear of injustice shows that it is more favorable than justice. Socrates refutes this by looking at what an unjust city is capable of achieving. He says that an unjust city cannot work together because the individuals are constantly at a war with each other and it takes a Just man to work together and accomplish things.

So injustice is never more profitable than justice because a Just person will get things done while an unjust person will rule and manage poorly. In each definition self-interest plays an important role in the meaning behind justice. Cephalus' bases his definition of Justice on telling the truth and returning what one borrowed. This is rooted in self-interest as an individual strives to fix any harm that one has caused, hence Justice is making sure one owes nothing to the world. Socrates' example with the gun, better explains this; if one decided to return the gun to a mad person they would potentially be causing harm to others.

However the Just act would be to return the gun even though it is also the "wrong" thing to do. In Polemarchus' definition of Justice Socrates again uses self-interest to prove Polemarchus' definition wrong. Polemarchus feels that Justice is doing well to one's friends and doing harm to one's enemies. Nonetheless, his definition allows for harm to be done to others, which is unjust. Polemarchus' definition does not fully describe justice because it places so much significance on the choice of an individual.

Thrasymachus' definition of Justice was based on the advantage of the strong. By separating the strong from the weak, he is actually placing importance on the interest of the strong over the interest of the weak.

Thrasymachus also looks at the effect that self-interest has on the city as a whole when he looks at an unjust city. And these unjust cities are torn apart by an individual's self-interest. Socrates has continually been refuting the others as they try to define Justice and his rebuttals begin to form what he feels his Justice is and how it relates to self-interest.

Glaucon asks Socrates where he would place Justice in the three categories, things we choose for our own sake, because of their consequences, or both. Socrates believes that it is both, which is things we choose to have because of their own sake and for their consequences. Socrates' view of Justice is revealed here, he shows how self-interest of an individual affects their views of Justice. As discovered through these three very different definitions and by Socrates' refusal to accept them, Justice is incredibly complex.

Each person has a different view of what Justice means to them as proven by Cephalus, Polemarchus, Thrasymachus and Socrates. There is no right answer to what Justice is, what is just for one may be unjust for someone else. As Socrates and Cephalus agreed upon, there are exceptions. An exception is defined as an opposition of opinion. Each definition given in *The Republic* shows a different view as to what Justice truly is, while Socrates' seems to point out this opposition of opinion. So Justice provides for many exceptions.

What is right and what is wrong depends solely on one, there is no true right or wrong in the world, and that is what creates this. All the individuals attempt to define Justice but Socrates' proves to them that their definition is not the true meaning of Justice. Justice is rather a complex concept that does not have one definition. Socrates simply refutes each of the men's ideas and slowly begins to form what he feels Justice truly is. He sees how self-interest influences each definition and understands the motives as to why one would choose to be Just. Thus, Socrates' concludes that Justice lies both in the soul and the individual.