

Thrasymachus' views on justice

Philosophy



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The position Thrasymachus takes on the definition of justice, as well as its importance in society, is one far differing from the opinions of the other interlocutors in the first book of Plato's Republic. Embracing his role as a Sophist in Athenian society, Thrasymachus sets out to aggressively dispute Socrates' opinion that justice is a beneficial and valuable aspect of life and the ideal society. Throughout the course of the dialogue, Thrasymachus formulates three major assertions regarding justice.

These claims include his opinion that "justice is nothing other than the advantage of the stronger," "it is just to obey the rulers," and "justice is really the good of another [...] and harmful to the one who obeys and serves." Socrates continuously challenges these claims using what is now known as the "Socratic method" of questioning, while Thrasymachus works to defend his views. This paper seeks to argue the implausibility of Thrasymachus' views through an analysis of his main claims regarding justice, as well as his view that injustice brings greater happiness.

In Book I of Republic, Socrates attempts to define justice with the help of his friends and acquaintances. After a number of suggestions prove false or insufficient, Thrasymachus tries his hand to define the term, convinced that his definition rings true. Thrasymachus begins in stating, "justice is nothing other than the advantage of the stronger, 1" and after prodding, explains what he means by this. Thrasymachus believes that the stronger rule society, therefore, creating laws and defining to the many what should be considered just.

He pertains, however, that the stronger create said laws for their own benefit and therefore in acting justly, the ruled are performing for the rulers benefit and not their own. This argument is not feasible for a variety of reasons. One of the key characteristics of justice is fairness, which can also be defined as being reasonable or impartial. 5 Impartiality means that you do not favour one side over another⁶, and therefore implies that if one were to act justly and therefore impartially, they would not act in a way to benefit only a select few.

Furthermore, justice in its true form cannot be used solely for the advantage of the stronger without the masses acknowledging the injustices being imposed upon them, as Thrasymachus suggests is the case. For justice is one of the many characteristics of morality, which is considered to be intrinsic based on an inner conviction. 7 Therefore, if the many were acting against said inner conviction wholly for the benefit of the stronger, would they not experience a natural feeling of injustice?

This argument alike can be used to refute another of Thrasymachus' primary claims that " justice is really the good of another [...] and harmful to the one who obeys and serves. " 3 In addition to his definition, Thrasymachus argues the value of justice as a human or societal characteristic, claiming that injustice is far more beneficial to the individual. Thrasymachus asserts that tyranny: makes the doer of injustice happiest and the sufferers of it, who are unwilling to do injustice, most wretched. ...] injustice, if it is on a large enough scale, is stronger, freer, and more masterly than justice. 5 To decide whether an unjust man finds more happiness than a just man does, one must understand the true meaning of the word. The dictionary defines happiness <https://assignbuster.com/thrasymachus-views-on-justice/>

as “ characterized by pleasure, contentment, or joy. ” 8 Thrasymachus typifies the unjust man as someone who is constantly seeking self-fulfillment, pleasing their desires no matter what the cost to others.

It is in their nature to never be satisfied with what they have, and therefore it is unlikely that the unjust man could ever experience true contentment. In contrast, the just man is content upholding laws and acting for the greater good and is therefore capable of experiencing a greater happiness than one who partakes in injustices. The dictionary goes on to state that happiness can also be defined as “ feeling satisfied that something is right or has been done right. 8 Thus, an unjust man could never truly be happy, as they are aware of the injustices they have committed unto others in order to benefit themselves. In addition, if one is to look to the cardinal virtues, not only is justice itself included, temperance is as well. Temperance, meaning “ restraint in the face of temptation or desire” 9 is not a characteristic of an unjust man. In fact, Thrasymachus argues that one should always seek to fulfill their own desires exercising injustice as a way to do so.

Virtue is said to be a measure of one's worth, therefore, in turning their back on it, an unjust man could never be as self fulfilled and happy as a virtuous one. The first book of Republic illustrates a diverse range of views in reference to the definition of justice. None, however, evokes such controversy and analysis as Thrasymachus' dialogue. His point of view calls to the forefront a number of important questions regarding the issue, and is an essential piece to Plato's puzzle of defining justice.

Thrasymachus's arguments in and of themselves, however, are implausible as discussed above. Not only does his claim that "justice is nothing other than the advantage of the stronger," 1 go against morality and assume the masses naive, but his attempt to prove that the unjust man is happier than the just man is insufficient and untrue. Works Cited Encarta World English Dictionary. 2004 Plato. The Republic. Translated by G. M. A. Grube. Revised by C. D. C. Reeve. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company. 1992. 382c