

The idea of justice

[Linguistics](#), [English](#)



The Idea of Justice One of the central concerns of the modern day judicial system is the nature of justice. Everyday in courtrooms across the world justice and retribution are debated and enacted in a countless array of contexts. Even as this is a pervasive contemporary concern, philosophical investigations into the nature of justice date back to at least Greek antiquity. In these regards, justice is a prominent consideration in the work of both Plato and Epicurus. While these philosophers articulated early notions of justice, they do so in slightly divergent ways. This essay examines these notions of justice in Plato's *Apology* and selections from Epicurus. One of the predominant aspects of justice in Plato's *Apology* and selections from Epicurus is the nature of the medium of expression. In the *Apology*, Plato explores the notion of justice through Socrates' trial and defense; conversely, Epicurus' writing is generally relayed through point-by-point aphorisms. In this context of understanding, the medium through which justice is expressed necessitates that there are slightly different formulations. Consider Epicurus who writes, "Natural justice is a pledge of reciprocal benefit, to prevent one man from harming or being harmed by another" (Epicurus, pg. 10). This notion characterizes justice as not a social arrangement, but a natural element of life that occurs as humans pledge reciprocal benefit to stop one man from harming another. In many degrees one can see a similar natural notion of justice expressed in Plato's text. While contemporary notions of justice might resort to judicial laws or religious texts, these Greek incarnations of the concept are clearly more interested in the concepts natural and intuitive elements. For instance, consider Socrates when he states, "Now do you really imagine that I could

have survived all these years, if I had led a public life, supposing that like a good man I had always supported the right and had made justice, as I ought, the first thing?" (Plato, pg. 27). Here Socrates is asking the council to consider that he would not have been able to survive if he had followed his version of justice. In these regards, he is referring to justice as sort of internal or intuitive quality. It's clear that both Plato and Epicurus present visions of justice as natural or intuitive. While Plato and Epicurus present notions of justice as natural and intuitive, they disagree on elements related to following justice. Consider Epicurus when he states, " Injustice is not an evil in itself, but only in consequence of the fear which is associated with the apprehension of being discovered by those appointed to punish such actions" (Epicurus, pg. 12). This is an important formulation of justice. Essentially Epicurus is indicating that while there is a root nature of evil, justice is not the same as this. Instead, justice only exists in the mutual agreements between members of society. This notion of justice is different from Plato's understanding. While the Apology never makes direct reference to Plato's theory of forms, it's clear that the philosopher's notion of justice is highly rooted in these concepts. Consider Socrates when he writes, " I do not suppose that I know: but I do know that injustice and disobedience to a better, whether God or man, is evil and dishonorable, and I will never fear or avoid a possible good rather than a certain evil" (Plato, pg. 24). This statement occurs after Socrates has finished his speech about the nature of wisdom. For Socrates, wisdom is the realization of the expansive nature of knowledge. In the above statement Socrates is indicating that in performing an injustice is evil. This is an important notion as it both indicates that justice

is a definable form and that in not following it one is being evil. Ultimately, Socrates never directly indicates what this underlining form of justice is, but indirectly indicates that in remaining true to one's self and following this internal will, one will be living a just existence. In conclusion, this essay has examined justice and the ideas of justice in Plato's the Apology, and the selections from Epicurus. In this context of understanding the nature of justice in both texts is understood as being a natural and intuitive element. In addition, both writers disagree on the nature of acting in an unjust way, as Epicurus views justice not as an innate form, but an agreement between individuals. Through both texts it's clear that the nature of justice is one of the central concerns of human social existence. References Plato. The Apology. New York: Cornell University Press. 1998. Epicurus. Essential Epicurus. Prometheus Books. 1993.