

# Socrates' justice essay



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In *The Republic*, Plato wrote a dialog between Socrates and his friends about the meaning of justice. They came into four definitions of justice, returning debts, helping friends, a system that benefits the strong, and a virtue that feels good. When asked about the meaning of justice, Cephalus believed that justice was the repayment of debt. Justice is completed when one's debt is fully returned. Socrates believed that the theory was flawed and may deliver disastrous results if applied in every situation. For example, if someone without a doctor's prescription gives me money in exchange for some prescription-only drugs, should I give the person the drugs? According to the "returning debt" theory, the answer is yes.

When a person gives me some money or anything for that matter, I am in debt to that person, and it will be just if I give that person something equal in return. The problem is the person may become intoxicated and harm his or her own body by taking the drugs without a doctor's supervision. The justice is complete, but the result is bad. In other words, I am actually doing a disadvantage (wrong drugs) to someone while taking an advantage (money) myself. Thus the person did not have justice.

Socrates and the other philosophers then had agreed that justice was not simply returning one's debt. The next definition of justice was raised. "...justice is to help your friends and harm your enemies." By that definition, we need to make sure that when returning debt, we don't harm our friends as well. In the previous drug case, I should not give the person the drugs because he or she is my customer. Another issue was then raised.

Socrates pointed out that sometimes we make the wrong judgment about who are friends and who are enemies. There are people who seem kind yet mean us harm and there are people who seem hostile yet mean us no harm. What about a good friend who wants us to use illegal drugs and a police officer who will arrest us for doing so. Does it make the officer a hostile enemy for trapping our body in a cell? Or does it make the friend a good friend for making our body feel good by taking the drugs? Socrates then concluded that "...justice is to do good to friends when they are good, and to harm enemies when they are bad..." By the time Socrates and his friends were satisfied with the definition of justice, Thrasymachus challenged them, claiming that he had a different and better definition of justice.

Thrasymachus declared that "...justice is nothing else than that which is advantageous to the stronger. " Everywhere the law is set by the ruling government according to their interest.

They see that what is in line with their interests is just and punish those who depart from them. The established government is the master. The United States embargo against Cuba made it illegal for the United States citizens to travel to Cuba without special approval from the government. Even though the people I want to visit in Cuba do not mean any harm to my interests nor vice versa, it is against the United States government interests. The ruling government has the right to deem my action unjust and punishable. The ruling government or the stronger is the master, according to Thrasymachus' theory.

Socrates disagreed with Thrasymachus belief that the stronger is the master. He argued that the government can also make mistake in creating

the laws. That means that the law that the crafted to aid the rulers can also mistakenly designed against their own interests, thus serving them injustice. Further, Socrates claimed that isn't a doctor has more power than the patient, yet the doctor's main interest is in the wellness of the patient. By saying so Socrates disproved Thrasymachus' argument that justice is to benefit the stronger. Socrates believed that justice is a virtue within one's self that is able to allow the rational mind to control one's actions, as well as one's passions.

According to Socrates, this would result in a harmonious life that could not be obtained through money or fame. I have not decided which theory I agree the most. It seems to me that each situation may require a different definition of justice. Justice may not have a solid form nor can it be contained in one truth.