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RP 2

“How does Plato teach the reader about justice through Socratic dialogue?”

Throughout Books I and II, Plato teaches the reader about justice through Socrates’ talks with Cephalus, Polemarchus, Thrasymachus, Glaucon, and Adeimantus. During these talks, Socrates counters his opponents’ arguments by examining how the flaws in their point of views disprove their beliefs on what justice and injustice is. In addition, Socrates thoroughly examines arguments that praise injustice over justice. By doing so, he dismisses traditional claims of justice being either a necessary evil or just a way to pay back debts when due, and provides insight into the nature of justice indirectly through his talks of injustice.

During his discussion with Cephalus and Polemarchus, Plato, through Socrates, dismisses the traditional belief that justice is when a person pays back their debts when they are due and is honest. Although Socrates admits that Cephalus’ argument was “of fine sentiment”, he points out that Cephalus’ definition of justice does not cover a situation in which someone borrows a weapon from a sane friend who then becomes insane, stating that “the friend should not return [the weapon], and would not be just if he did”.[[1]](#footnote-1) Additionally, in his talks with Polemarchus, he also disproves Polemarchus’ claims that justice is when one is good to friends and bad to enemies, noting that a person’s judgment is flawed. By explaining how Socrates found the flaws in the arguments of others, Plato teaches the reader what justice is indirectly through this method by eliminating common beliefs about justice, thus demonstrating what justice is not.

Another way that Plato demonstrates what justice is to the reader is with Socrates’ talks with Thrasymachus, Glaucon, and Adeimantus. The three men argue that injustice is superior to justice because the injust lead better, healthier lives than the just. Thrasymachus states that injustice makes “those who do injustice happiest, and those who suffer it—those who are unwilling to do injustice—most wretched”.[[2]](#footnote-2) Glaucon and Adeimantus issue an argument similar to Thrasymachus’, in that the just are weak while the injust are strong. Plato counters their arguments by comparing justice to illustrious virtues such as wisdom, showing that justice is well-respected in comparison to injustice. By illustrating arguments that some readers may have that favor injustice through the words of Thrasymachus, Glaucon, and Adeimantus, Plato demonstrates what justice is by countering those arguments and allowing the readers to indirectly learn by showing the differences between justice and injustice during Socrates’ counterarguments against the three men. Therefore, Plato allows readers to realize what justice is through the Socratic dialogue by clearing any doubts of the strengths and differences of justice and injustice.

I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work. Renae Taylor

Works Cited

Plato. *The Republic.* Translated by C. D. C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2004.

1. Plato. *The Republic.* Translated by C. D. C. Reeve. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2004), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., 21 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)