

Cephalus, Socrates, and Asking for A Life Without Debt



Plato's *Republic* is a significant philosophical text in finding the concise definition of justice. In particular, Book I demonstrates three key arguments for a conclusive definition of justice as it relates to injustice, all three from Cephalus, Polemarchus, and Thrasymachus. The first argument comes from Cephalus, a wealthy Athenian arms manufacturer and the father of Polemarchus.

His argument, as simplified in the Bernie Sanders meme, is justifying wealth and paying off debts constitutes the definition of justice, and therefore, honesty in repaying those debts back. Socrates then questions this notion, showing

inconsistencies with those who either cannot cover debts, like the poor or those who refuse to pay those debts back in scenarios of bribery or general corruption. It is defined specifically in lines 331a and 331b of the *Republic* in response to writing from Pindar, stating: "And I would say it's here that money is the most useful, not just to anyone but the person who is respectable and self-disciplined. Having wealth can do a great deal to prevent involuntary cheating or lying to someone, or being afraid, when the time comes to move on, because one owes a sacrifice to the gods or money to a man. It has many other uses, but I would say, Socrates, that comparing them one by one, this is not the least way in which wealth is most of use to a man of good sense.

Socrates responds in 331c with "But this very thing, justice, can we just simply say that it is telling the truth and returning what one has taken from another, or are such things sometimes just to do and sometimes unjust? I mean, for example, everyone would say that if someone, when he was of sound mind, placed arms with a friend, but then was mad when he demanded them back, that one should not return them, and that returning them would be unjust. And neither would be choosing to tell the complete truth to someone in such a condition."

The "I Am Once Again Asking You for Your Financial Support" meme is a quote from Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) from his December 2019 fundraising campaign. While it has more uses in memes corresponding with monetary donations being requested, but it has also been used in context of asking questions in general. While much of *The Republic* is Socrates countering arguments for the definitive question "What is justice?", this meme shows a specific counter argument, leading to more arguments and, later in the text, no specific answer to the question as every argument reveals discrepancies according to Socrates. Bernie saying "I am once again

asking why using wealth to pay off debt constitutes the definition of justice and honesty” corresponds to Cephalus’s argument in lines 331a-b and Socrates’s rebuttal in line 331c.

Extra memes that didn’t quite make the cut in this assignment, but hold relevance:

