

# **The Nature of Justice**

A critical evaluation of the nature of Socratic justice in Books I and II of Plato's

*The Republic*

by

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## Abstract

In Books I and II of *The Republic*, Plato raises the arguments on the nature of intrinsic justice and its manifestations for those that are inherently just. Socrates argues that justice is good in itself, rather than for its consequences. He alludes to a series of analogies to demonstrate that justice is exclusive from its methods. (*ibid* pp. 332c-333e) He also asserts that justice is good for others and benefits them, by arguing that justice entails the maintenance of others and fundamentally creates unity with all those that participate. (*ibid* pp. 335d; 339e; 342c; 333c; 351a-352b) Yet, Socrates' detractors object to the Socratic doctrine, and argue that justice is instrumental. (i) Justice is constructed under 'natural right' and the will of the stronger; (*ibid* p. 338c) (ii) Justice is merely an appearance. (*ibid* pp. 359a-b) This is illustrated with the analogy of the moral contract and the intrinsic nature of the unjust; (*ibid* pp. 359a-b; 366c-d) (iii) Both the just and the unjust would act with injustice where there was no detection of wrong-doing. (*ibid* pp. 360b-c) This is illustrated by the myth of Gyges of Lydia and a ring that enabled the ring-bearer to become invisible; (*ibid* pp. 360a-b) (iv) Instrumental justice offers *greater happiness* than intrinsic justice, due to the freedom of action it entails. (Plato *op cit* pp. 361a-b) This thesis addresses the question of instrumental justice versus Socratic intrinsic justice. Furthermore, it is argued that justice is instrumental and that Socrates' argument does not demonstrate that intrinsic justice is an actuality.