



Republic

— BOOK II —

Now, having said all this, I thought I was quit of the argument, but it turned out in the end to be a mere prelude. For Glaucon, who is always extremely forthright on every issue, on this occasion in particular could not accept the withdrawal of Thrasymachus, so he said, “Socrates, do you wish to seem to have persuaded us, or do you wish to persuade us truly that it is better in every way to be just rather than unjust?” 357 a
357 b

“To persuade you truly,” said I. “That is what I would choose if it were up to me.”

“Well, then,” said he, “you are not doing what you wish to do. Yes, tell me this. Do you think there is a kind of good that we would choose to have not with a view to getting something out of it, but because we welcome it for its own sake, like enjoyment and pleasures that are harmless and produce no future consequences apart from enjoying their possession?”

“Well,” said I, “I think there is a good of this kind.” 357 c

“What about the kind we prize both for its own sake and for what it gives rise to, thinking, for instance, and seeing, or being healthy, since we welcome these, presumably, for both reasons?”

“Yes,” said I.

“And do you see a third form of good which includes physical exercise, being healed when you are ill, healing others, and money-making in general? These we would say are troublesome, and although they benefit us we would not choose to have them for their own sake but for their rewards and for whatever else they give rise to.” 357 d

“Yes, indeed,” said I. “There is also this third form, but what about it?”

“In which of these three do you place justice?” he asked.

“I think,” said I, “that it belongs in the noblest of the three, the one that should be prized for itself and for what it gives rise to by anyone who is to be blessed.” 358 a

“Well, most people do not think so,” said he. “They think it belongs in the troublesome form that should be practised for the sake of its rewards, and for reputation based on appearance, but just by itself it should be avoided because it is difficult.”

“I know that that is how they think,” said I, “and Thrasymachus has been criticising justice for some time for being like this, and he has been praising injustice. But it seems I am a slow learner.”

“Come on, then,” said he, “and see if you still hold the same view after you listen to me. For Thrasymachus seems to me like a snake who has submitted to your charms more meekly than he should, since to my mind no proof on either side has yet been given. For I am eager to hear what each is, and what power each possesses, just by itself, when present in the soul, and to set to one side their rewards and whatever arises from them.” 358 b

“So I shall proceed in this way if, indeed, it seems acceptable to you. I shall revive Thrasymachus’ argument, and I shall say first the sort of thing they maintain justice is, and where it has come from. Secondly, I shall show that everyone who practises it does so against their own 358 c

free will, as a necessity and not as something good. And thirdly, I shall demonstrate that they are acting reasonably in doing so, because the life of the unjust is actually far better than the life of the just, according to them.

358 d “Although this is not how it seems to me at all, Socrates, I am perplexed, nevertheless, from hearing Thrasymachus and countless others assailing my ears, while the argument on behalf of justice, that it is better than injustice, I have heard so far from no one in the way I wish to hear it. I wish to hear justice itself being praised for itself, and I think I am most likely to get this from you.

“That is why I shall speak forcibly in praise of the unjust life, and in speaking like this I shall demonstrate to you the manner in which I want to hear you, in turn, censuring injustice and praising justice. So let us see if what I am proposing is to your liking.”

358 e “More than anything,” said I. “Yes, what could be more delightful to a person of intelligence than hearing about this issue and discussing it again and again?”

“You put that perfectly,” said he. “Now, listen to the first thing I said I was going to say on this matter, the sort of thing justice is, and where it has come from. Indeed, according to them, doing injustice is good by nature, while suffering injustice is bad, and the badness in suffering injustice far exceeds the good in doing it. And so, when people are being unjust to one another, and suffering injustice too, and getting a taste of both the doing and the suffering, those who are 359 a unable to avoid the one and opt for the other think it profitable to enter a contract with one another, neither to do injustice nor to suffer it. From there they began to set down laws, mutual contracts, and to call whatever the law commands lawful and just. This they say is the origin and the very essence of justice. It is a middle ground between what is best – not paying a penalty when you act unjustly – and what is worst – being unable to get revenge when you suffer injustice. And what is 359 b just, being midway between both extremes, is prized not as something good but as something that is respected due to an inability to do injustice, since a true man, who can actually do this, would never enter into a contract with anyone neither to do injustice nor to suffer injustice. That would be madness. So, Socrates, according to their argument, such is the nature of justice. This is what it is like, and such are its natural origins.

359 c “Now, we would be most likely to see that those who practise justice do so against their will because they lack the power to act unjustly, if we were to picture in mind a situation somewhat as follows. Let us grant each of these two, the just and the unjust person, licence to do whatever they want. Then we shall accompany them and watch where their desire may lead them in each case. We would then catch the just person, in the very act, doing the same thing as the unjust person, getting more. This is what every nature naturally pursues as something good, despite being forcibly misled by law into respecting equality.

359 d “The sort of licence I am referring to would be most apparent if they were to possess the power that they say once belonged to the ancestor of Gyges of Lydia.¹ Well, he was a shepherd working for the then ruler of Lydia, when there was a huge storm and an earthquake. The ground broke apart and a chasm appeared in the very place he was tending the flocks. When he saw it he was amazed, went down into it and, the story goes, he beheld other amazing sights, including a hollow bronze horse which had little doors. And when he bent down and peeped in, he saw that there was a corpse inside that appeared to be larger than a human. This corpse was wearing nothing 359 e else apart from a gold ring on its finger. He removed the ring and went out again.

360 a “When the usual meeting of shepherds was held to report to the king, on a monthly basis, on the state of his flocks, he arrived wearing the ring. As he sat down with the others, he happened to turn the ring around towards himself to the inside of his hand. With that, he became invisible to the people he was sitting with, and they spoke about him as if he was not there. He was amazed, and as he fiddled with the ring again he turned the ring outwards, and he immediately became visible once more. Once he had noticed this, he tested the ring out to see if it really had this power,

and he found that this was so. On turning the ring inwards he became invisible, on turning it outwards he became visible.

“Having become aware of this, he immediately contrived to become one of the messengers that go to the king. When he got there he seduced the king’s wife, and with her assistance he set upon the king, killed him, and took over the kingship. 360 b

“Now, if there were two rings like this, and one was worn by our just person, the other by our unjust person, there is no one, it would seem, with such adamant resolve as to abide by justice, and dare to refrain from touching other people’s possessions when it is possible for him, with no fear, to take whatever he wants from the market, go into private houses and lie with whomever he wants, to kill anyone, or free anyone he wants from prison, and to behave generally among his fellow men as though he were the equal of a god. But behaving in this manner he would not be doing anything different from the other fellow. They would both be going down the same path. 360 c

“So, someone might say that this is strong evidence that no one, of his own free will, is just, but only when he is compelled to be so, because being just is not something that is good for him personally, since whenever a person believes he will be able to act unjustly, he will do so. For every man believes that injustice is far more profitable, personally, than justice. And what they believe is true, as anyone who puts forward an argument of this sort will maintain, because if someone who has obtained such licence as this never had any desire to act unjustly, nor to lay hands on other people’s possessions, he would be regarded as wretched and devoid of intelligence by those who noticed, although they would still praise him when face to face with one another, deceiving one another completely because of their fear of suffering injustice. 360 d

“Well then, so much for that. As for this decision concerning the life of the people we are speaking of, we shall be able to decide the issue correctly once we contrast the most just person with the most unjust, but not otherwise. So what contrast do I mean? It is as follows. Let us take nothing away from the injustice of the unjust man, nor from the justice of the just man. No, let us propose that each of them is perfect in terms of his own conduct. So in the first place, let the unjust man act like expert craftsmen, such as a foremost steersman or physician, who is fully aware of the impossibilities and the possibilities associated with his skill, and who attempts what is possible and sets aside what is impossible. And even if he slips up somewhere, he is up to the task of setting it right. So we should also allow the unjust man, attempting his unjust acts in the correct manner, to go undetected if he is going to be utterly unjust. And we should regard the fellow who gets caught as inept, for the pinnacle of injustice is to seem just, even though one is not. 360 e

“So, let us grant complete injustice to the completely unjust person, and there should be no omissions, but we should allow him, whilst perpetrating the greatest injustices, to have provided himself with the greatest reputation for justice. And even if he does slip up somewhere, let us grant him the ability to set it right, to speak persuasively enough if any of his unjust actions are ever exposed, and to use force to whatever extent force is needed, because he has the courage and strength to do so and because he is well supplied with friends and property. And having put an unjust person of this sort in place, we should set the just person alongside him, in our account, a simple, noble man who, as Aeschylus says, wishes to be good, and not just to seem so.² 361 a

“So we must take away this ‘seeming’, for if he is going to seem just, he will have honours and privileges because he seems to be this sort of person. Accordingly, it will not be clear whether he is the sort of person he is for the sake of justice or for the sake of the privileges and honours. 361 c

¹ Gyges was a king of Lydia, a kingdom in Asia Minor. The story Glaucon tells is about an ancestor of Gyges and his rise to the Lydian throne. Herodotus, *Histories* 1.8–13 tells a different story of Gyges’ rise to power.

² Aeschylus, *Seven Against Thebes* 592–594. The quote is elaborated and expanded below.

So we should strip away everything else apart from justice, and make his situation the exact opposite of the previous fellow. For although he is doing nothing unjust, let him have an enormous reputation for injustice so that he may be well tested, in terms of justice, by resisting any softening in the face of a bad reputation, and whatever results from that. But let him persist unto death, undeflected in his course, reputed to be unjust even though he is just, so that both men, having attained the pinnacle of justice in one case and of injustice in the other, may be judged as to which of the two is happier.”

“My, my, dear Glaucon,” said I, “how thoroughly you clean up both men for judgement, as though they were two statues.”

“I am doing my best,” said he, “and since they are both like this, it will no longer be hard, in my view, to complete our account of the sort of life that is in store for each of them. So this should be described, Socrates, and in this case, if it is described in very crude terms, do not presume that I am the one who is saying this. No, it is the people who praise injustice above justice.

“The people will say that the just man in this situation will be whipped, stretched on the rack, put in chains, have his eyes burned out, and finally, having suffered all possible evils, he will be impaled and will come to realise that one should not wish to be just, but to seem to be so. And the saying of Aeschylus turns out to be much more applicable to the unjust man. For they maintain that, in fact, the unjust man, since he is engaging in something that adheres to truth and does not live his life according to mere seeming, does not wish to seem unjust but to be so,

*Enjoying the fruits of the deep furrow of thought
From which sagacious counsel is sprung.*

“Firstly, he rules in the city because he seems to be just. Then he marries a wife from any family he wants and gives his children in marriage to whomsoever he wants, does business with anyone he wishes, and as well as being benefited by all of this he also gains by having no scruples about doing injustice. So, in competitive situations in private or in public, they say he wins out and gets more than his enemies, and is wealthy because he gets more, and so he does good to his friends and harm to his enemies. And he makes sufficient sacrifices and offerings to the gods, magnificently, and serves the gods and any people he wants to far better than the just man. As a result, they say it is more appropriate, in all probability, that he be more beloved of the gods than the just man. On this basis, Socrates, they say that from the gods, and from his fellow man too, the life provided to the unjust person is better than what is provided to the just.”

When Glaucon had said all this, I had in mind to say something in response, but his brother, Adimantus, said, “You surely do not imagine, Socrates, that enough has now been said about this argument?”

“But why not?” said I.

“The very point,” said he, “that most needed to be made has not been made.”

“In that case,” said I, “as the saying goes, ‘Let a brother be there for a brother’,³ and so you should come to his aid if this man has left anything out. And yet, for my part, what he has said already is enough to floor me and render me incapable of coming to the assistance of justice.”

“You are talking nonsense,” said he. “And yet, you should also listen to this. Yes, it is necessary that we go through the opposite arguments to the ones he recounted, arguments that praise justice and censure injustice so that the point I think Glaucon wishes to make may be clarified.

“Fathers, when speaking to their sons and offering them advice, and indeed anyone who cares for anyone, speak to them presumably about the need to be just by praising not justice itself but the good reputation derived from it, saying that by seeming to be just, from the reputation alone, they may secure positions of authority, and marriages, and whatever else Glaucon listed just now, all from having a reputation for being just.

“Yet these people have more to say on the subject of reputation. For when they throw in good reputation in the eyes of the gods, they describe a whole host of goods that they declare are given by the gods to holy people, just as noble Hesiod, and Homer too, declare in one case that for the just people the gods make oak trees 363 b

Bear acorns in their topmost branches with swarms of bees below

“And he says,

*Their woolly sheep are weighed down with fleeces.*⁴

And there are many other good things connected to these. In the other case, Homer says something similar:

*as of some king who, as a blameless man and god-fearing
and ruling as lord over many powerful people,
upholds the way of good government, and the black earth yields him
barley and wheat, his trees are heavy with fruit, his sheep flocks
continue to bear young, the sea gives him fish.*⁵ 363 c

“But the goods from the gods that Musaeus and his son bestow upon the just people are more novel than these.⁶ In their account they lead them into Hades, and having set them reclining at a symposium of holy people which they have prepared, they crown them with garlands and make them spend their time thereafter in a drunken state in the belief that the supreme reward for excellence is eternal drunkenness. Others extend the rewards from the gods even further than this, for they maintain that holy people who are faithful to their oaths leave behind them a whole race, children and children’s children. 363 d

“So, in these respects, and in others like these, they sing the praises of justice while they sink the unholy and unjust people into some mire in Hades and compel them to carry water in a sieve. And while they are still alive they bring them into evil repute, and they ascribe to these unjust people all the punishments that Glaucon listed for those who are just, but have a reputation for being unjust. But they have nothing else to say. 363 e

“Such then is the praise and the censure associated with each, with the just and the unjust. But as well as these, Socrates, consider also the kind of arguments about justice and injustice spoken by ordinary folk and by the poets. For they all, with one voice, keep saying that justice and sound-mindedness are something glorious but difficult and hard work to attain, while lack of restraint and injustice are pleasant and easy to attain, and only by opinion and convention are they a disgrace. 364 a

“They say that unjust actions are, for the most part, more profitable than just ones, and they regard bad people who are wealthy and generally powerful as happy, and they have no scruples about honouring them in public and in private while disrespecting and looking down on those who are in some way weak or poor, even whilst agreeing that these are better people than the others. 364 b

“But the most surprising of all these things is what they say about the gods and about excellence. They say that the gods themselves allot misfortunes and a bad life to many good people, and an opposite fate to people of the opposite sort. And begging priests and soothsayers, going to the doors of the wealthy man, convince him that they have a power provided by the gods through sacrifices and incantations to make good any injustice committed by him or his ancestors with pleasant festivities. And if he wants to bring ruin upon some enemy, with minimal expenditure on 364 c

³ *Odyssey* xvi.97-98.

⁴ Hesiod, *Works and Days* 323 ff.

⁵ *Odyssey* xix.109 ff, Lattimore.

⁶ Musaeus of Athens was a legendary poet and polymath who was closely associated with the religious mysteries. He is also mentioned in Plato’s *Apology* (41a).

his part, he may do harm to just and unjust alike with certain incantations and spells which, they claim, persuade the gods to serve them. And they bring forth poets as supporting witnesses to all these arguments, some making the case that badness is easy because

364 d *Badness is abundant and easy to lay hold of.
The road is smooth and it dwells very close at hand.
But the gods have placed sweat in front of the path of excellence*

“and a road that is long and rough and steep.⁷ Others bring in Homer as their witness that the gods are turned by humans, because he too said,

*Even the gods themselves are moved by prayer.
By sacrifices and soothing vows,
Libations and burnt offerings,
Humanity turns the will of the gods;
Praying whenever someone has transgressed or gone astray.⁸*

365 a “And they produce a confused array of books by Musaeus and Orpheus, the offspring of Selene⁹ and of the Muses they say, on the basis of which they perform their sacrificial rites, convincing not only private citizens but whole cities that there are remissions and purifications of their unjust deeds available through sacrifices and playful pleasantries to those who are still alive and also to those who have died. These they call initiations, which deliver us from the evils of the other world, where horrors await those who have not performed the sacrifices.

365 b “Dear Socrates,” said he, “when all this is being said about excellence and badness, and the esteem in which they are held by gods and by humans, and when it is said so often in these various ways, what do we think this will do to the souls of the young when they hear it, young people who are gifted and up to the task of, as it were, flitting between all the various formulations and working out from them the sort of person one should be, and how one should behave in order to lead the very best life possible? Indeed, he would be most likely to ask himself, after the manner of Pindar:

*Shall I, by justice or by crooked deceit
Ascend the high wall and, thus fortified,
live out the rest of my life?’*

365 c “For according to what is being said, there is no advantage to me in being just if I actually seem unjust, only trouble and losses that are plain to be seen. But if I am unjust and have secured a reputation for justice, a divinely sweet life is promised. Therefore, since the wise explain to me that seeming overpowers the truth and is lord of happiness, to this indeed should I turn fully. I must sketch about myself a shadowy picture of excellence as an exterior façade whilst trailing the cunning, subtle fox of the all-wise Archilochus behind me.¹⁰

365 d “‘But surely,’ someone will declare, ‘it is not easy to be bad and go undetected always.’ ‘Indeed,’ we shall say, ‘nothing else that is worthwhile is an easy matter either. Nevertheless, if we are going to enjoy happiness, this is the path we must follow since that is the way the footprints of these arguments are leading us. So we shall form companies and associations in order to avoid being detected, and there are teachers of persuasion who, for a fee, impart the wisdom needed for public speaking and for winning lawsuits. Based on these, we shall use persuasion in some cases, and force in other cases, so that we may continue to get more, with impunity.’

365 e “‘But, of course,’ someone might say, ‘you do not go undetected by the gods, nor can you use force against them.’ ‘But what if there are no gods, or human affairs do not concern them at all? Why should we, for our part, care about not being detected? If, on the other hand, there are gods and they do care about us, we know about them and have heard of them from no other sources than the laws and the genealogies of the poets, the very sources who are saying they are amenable to being turned and persuaded by sacrifices, soothing vows and offerings. We must believe either

both or neither. Now, if they are to be believed, then we should act unjustly and offer sacrifice from the fruits of our unjust acts. For by being just we shall merely go unpunished by the gods, but we shall forgo the advantages born of injustice. However, by being unjust we shall have the advantages, and by praying when we transgress or fall into error we shall win them over and escape unpunished.’ 366 a

“‘But surely,’ someone may say, ‘we shall pay a just penalty in Hades for whatever injustices we may have done here, either ourselves or our children’s children.’ ‘But, my friend,’ he will reply on reflection, ‘the initiations, for their part, are extremely powerful, and so are the gods of deliverance. So say the greatest cities and the children of the gods who have become the gods’ poets and prophets, and who reveal that this is indeed the case.’ 366 b

“Now, by what argument might we still choose justice in preference to gross injustice, which we may attain along with a fraudulent seemliness, and act as we are minded to act with gods and with humans, in life and after death, as the argument of most people, and of the special folk too, proclaims? Indeed, from all that has been said, is there any way, Socrates, that anyone possessed of any intellectual, physical, financial or family power would be willing to revere justice, and not laugh when he hears it being praised? And so, if someone is able to demonstrate that what we have said is false, and has recognised well enough that justice is best, he has a lot of sympathy with those who are unjust and is not angry with them. He knows, rather, that apart from someone who cannot bear to act unjustly because of a divine nature, or who refrains from it because of the knowledge he has acquired, no one else is just of their own free will. Rather, they censure unjust action out of cowardice, old age, or some other weakness, because they are powerless to enact it. This must be obvious, because the first such person who attains the power to do so, is the first person to act unjustly as much as he possibly can. 366 c

“And there is no other cause of all this except the origin of this entire argument, directed by Glaucon and myself towards you, Socrates, to make the case that, ‘Come on, my wonderful man. Of all of you who claim to be champions of justice, beginning with the earliest heroes whose utterances are still with us, right down to human beings today, no one so far has censured injustice or praised justice on any other basis than reputation, esteem, and the advantages that derive from them. And no one so far, either in poetry or in ordinary language, has described in a sufficiently detailed argument what each does itself, by its own power, when present in the soul of its possessors, unnoticed by gods and humans, an argument according to which injustice is the worst of all the evils that any soul can have within itself, while justice is the greatest good. For if you had all described it in these terms from the beginning, and convinced us of this from our earliest years, we would not have been acting as one another’s guardians for fear we might behave unjustly, but each of us would himself be his own guardian for fear that by acting unjustly he would have to live with the worst evil of all.’ 366 d

“This, Socrates, and perhaps even more than this, is what Thrasymachus, and anyone else too I suppose, might say about justice and injustice, by crudely misrepresenting, in my opinion at any rate, the power they possess. But I, and I need to hide nothing from you, am speaking as forcefully as I possibly can because I am eager to hear you expressing the opposite views. Do not just show us, by your argument, that justice is stronger than injustice, but show what each of them, just by itself, is doing to their possessor, such that one is bad and the other good. And take away the reputations that go with them, as Glaucon directed you, for unless you take away the 367 a

⁷ Hesiod, *Works and Days* 287–289.

⁸ *Iliad* ix, 497–501.

⁹ Selene was goddess of the moon.

¹⁰ Archilochus was a lyric poet from the island of Paros who was known for his versatile use of poetic metre. The reference here is to his fable about a fox and a hedgehog. 367 b

367 c true reputations from each, and substitute the false ones, we shall say that you are not praising what is just, but what is reputed to be just, nor are you censuring what is unjust, but what is reputed to be so, and you are encouraging us to be unjust without being noticed. And you are agreeing with Thrasymachus that what is just is someone else's good since it is the advantage of the stronger, while what is unjust is to one's own advantage and it is profitable, but it is disadvantageous to the weaker.

367 d “Now, since you have agreed that justice is among the greatest goods, those that are worth acquiring for the sake of all that comes from them, but much more so for themselves – goods like sight, hearing, intelligence, and indeed health, and whatever other goods are fruitful by their own nature, and not merely by opinion – you should therefore praise this particular aspect of justice which, in its own right, benefits its possessor, while injustice does him harm. Leave the rewards and the reputations for others to praise, because although I might put up with other people when they are praising justice and censuring injustice in this way, by extolling or bewailing their associated reputations and rewards, I will not accept it from you unless you order me to do so, because 367 e you have spent your whole life considering this issue and nothing else.

“So, do not just show us, by our argument alone, that justice is stronger than injustice, but show what each of them, just by itself, is doing to their possessor, whether gods or humans notice this or not, such that one is good and the other bad.”

368 a Now, although I had always admired the natural qualities of Glaucon and Adimantus, nevertheless, when I heard them on this occasion I was utterly delighted and I said, “You are worthy sons of your own father, and that admirer of Glaucon's began his eulogy of you quite nicely, after you had distinguished yourselves at the battle of Megara, when he said,

Sons of Ariston, a godlike race is born of an illustrious man.

368 b “And I think this captures the point quite well, my friends, for you have been much influenced by the divine if you are able to speak of injustice in these terms, without being convinced that it is better than justice. And it does seem to me that you are, in truth, unconvinced. And my evidence for this is your character in general, since on the basis of your speeches themselves, I would have doubted you both. But the more I trust you, the more I am at a loss as to how I should proceed, for I am not able to render any assistance. Indeed, I seem to be incapable of doing so, as indicated by the fact that you have not accepted what I said to Thrasymachus, which I thought showed that justice is better than injustice. Nor again am I capable of not rendering assistance, for I am afraid that 368 c it might be an unholy act were I to be present when justice is being ill-spoken of, and fail her by not coming to her aid while I still had life and power of utterance. So under the circumstances, it is best that I help her to the best of my ability.”

Now, Glaucon, and the others too, begged me in all sorts of ways to render assistance and not give up on the argument, but to examine in detail what each is and where the truth really lies about the benefit of each. So, I said what I was thinking. “The enquiry we are undertaking is no ordinary one,” said I. “No, it calls for keen vision. That is how it seems to me. Now, since we are not clever people,” I said, “I think we should conduct an investigation somewhat as follows. It is as if someone had ordered us to read very small letters from afar when we are not very keen-sighted, and someone then realised that the same letters are situated somewhere else, but larger, and on something larger. I think it would look like a godsend to read the smaller letters after we have first read the larger ones, if they happened to be the same.”

368 e “Yes, indeed,” said Adimantus, “but what do you see of this sort of thing in our enquiry into justice, Socrates?”

“I will tell you,” said I. “We maintain that there is justice of an individual man, and presumably also of an entire city?”

“Certainly,” said he.

“Is a city not larger than an individual man?”

“Larger,” said he.

“Then, surely there would be more justice in the larger, and it would be easier to apprehend. So, if you wish, first let us enquire into the sort of thing justice is in the cities. Then, on this basis, we may consider it even in one individual, thus considering the likeness of the larger in the character of the smaller.” 369 a

“Yes, I think that is a good suggestion,” said he.

“In that case,” said I, “if we were to watch a city coming into being in words, would we not also see the justice of the city coming into being, and its injustice too?”

“Quite likely,” said he.

“And once this had come into being, could we not hope to see what we are seeking more easily?” 369 b

“Very much so.”

“So do you think we should attempt to proceed with this, for I think this is no small task? So give it some consideration.”

“It has been considered,” said Adimantus, “and it simply must be done.”

“Well,” said I, “a city comes into being, as I see it, because none of us are actually self-sufficient. Indeed, we all fall short of this in many respects. Or do you think there is some other principle for the foundation of a city?”

“Not at all,” he replied.

“And so, it is that one person associates with another person for one purpose and with someone else for a different purpose, and since we all have many needs, we assemble people together into a single dwelling place as associates and helpers, and to this shared abode we give the name ‘city’. Is this so?” 369 c

“It is so.”

“And does one person give to another, if he does so, or receive something on the assumption that he himself will be better off?”

“Very much so.”

“Come on, then,” said I. “Let us make a city from the beginning, in words. And it seems that our own needs will be making it.”

“Of course.”

“And, indeed, the first and greatest of needs is for the provision of food, for the sake of being and living.” 369 d

“Entirely so.”

“The second is for housing, and the third is for clothing and such like.”

“That is it.”

“Come on,” said I. “What size city will be sufficient to provide for as many needs as this? Will there not be one farmer, a house builder too, and someone else who is a weaver? Or should we also add a shoemaker to it, and someone else who looks after bodily needs?”

“By all means.”

“In any case, the absolute minimum for a city to be a city would consist of four or five men.”

“So it appears.” 369 e

“What then? Should each one of them place his own work at the joint disposal of everyone else? Should the farmer, for instance, one man, provide food for the other four and spend four times the time and the effort in providing food which he shares with the others? Or should he pay them no attention and produce a quarter of the food for himself in a quarter of the time, spending the remaining three quarters in providing a house, clothing and some shoes, without having to bother about sharing with others, and attend to his own concerns just by himself?” 370 a

And Adimantus replied,

“The first way, Socrates, is probably easier than that.”

370 b “That is nothing strange, by Zeus,” said I. “Indeed, now that you say so, it also occurs to me that in the first place people are, by nature, not much like one another, rather they are naturally different. So one person is suited to one task, another to another task. Do you not think so?”

“I do.”

“What about this? Would someone, one person, fare better by practising a lot of skills, or is it better when one person practises one skill?”

“When one practises one,” said he.

“Then again, I believe, it is also obvious that if we neglect the right moment for some task, it comes to naught.”

“Yes, that is obvious.”

370 c “Indeed, in my view, that is because what is to be done is not prepared to wait until the person who is to do it has the time. No, the person needs to attend closely to what is to be done, not partially as a secondary task.”

“Yes, he must.”

“On this basis then, more is accomplished, and better and more easily, when one person does one thing that accords with his nature, at the right moment, free of involvement in anything else.”

“Entirely so.”

370 d “Then, Adimantus, more than four citizens are needed to provide all the services we were speaking of. For the farmer, it seems, will not make his own plough himself if it is to be a good one, nor his mattock either, nor any of the other tools required for farming. This applies to the house builder too, who also needs a lot of tools, as does the weaver and shoemaker.”

“True.”

“So carpenters, blacksmiths, and many craftsmen of this sort, becoming partners of our little city, will make it quite populous.”

“Yes, certainly.”

370 e “And it still would not be very large if we were to add oxherds and shepherds to their number, and other herdsmen, so that the farmers would have oxen for ploughing, and the house builders, and farmers too, would have beasts of burden to use for carrying loads, and the weavers and shoemakers would have leather and wool.”

“Indeed,” said he, “it would not be a small city either, if it contained all these.”

“And what is more,” said I, “it will be well-nigh impossible to found the city itself in a place where there will be no need of imported goods.”

“Impossible indeed.”

“So there will be a further need for even more people, who will import whatever is needed from other cities.”

“There will.”

371 a “And, indeed, if our agent goes empty handed, bringing nothing which the other cities need, goods they would import, goods they themselves need, he will return empty handed. Is this so?”

“I think so.”

“Then they need to produce at home not just enough for themselves, but also enough of the sort of goods that are needed by the cities they depend upon.”

“Yes, they need to.”

“So our city needs more farmers and other artificers.”

“Yes, more.”

“Then I presume we shall also need additional agents, who will import and export the goods in each case. These people are traders, are they not?”

“Yes.”

“Then we shall also need traders.”

“Very much so.”

“And if the trading is to take place by sea, then there will be a further need for a lot more people who are knowledgeable about seafaring.” 371 b

“A lot more, indeed.”

“And what happens in this city itself? How will each group share the products of their labour with one another? This was after all the very reason we founded our city and established a community.”

“Obviously,” said he, “through buying and selling.”

“Then a marketplace will arise from this, and a system of currency to facilitate the exchange.”

“Yes, certainly.”

“Now, if the farmer, or one of the other artificers brings something he has produced along to the marketplace and does not arrive at the same time as those who want to exchange what he has with him, will he sit about in the marketplace idle, not occupied with his own work?” 371 c

“Not at all,” said he. “There are people who see this situation and take on this function themselves. In cities that are properly managed, they are in general the least able-bodied folk, unsuited to involvement in any other work. For they need to wait about in the marketplace and exchange money for goods with people who wish to sell something, and again, goods for money with those who wish to buy something.” 371 d

“So this particular need,” said I, “is what gives rise to retailers in our city. Or do we not call those who set themselves up in the marketplace to act as agents for buying and selling, retailers, while referring to those who travel from city to city as traders?”

“Yes, certainly.”

“And there are still others too, I believe, agents who, when it comes to intellectual matters, are not really worthy of our community. And yet, they possess enough physical strength for manual labour. So they sell the use of their strength, referring to their reward as a wage, and that is why they are called wage-earners, I suppose. Is this so?” 371 e

“Yes.”

“Then wage-earners also fill out the population of our city?”

“I think so.”

“Well then, Adimantus, at this stage, has our city grown to full size?”

“Perhaps.”

“So where exactly would justice and injustice be in this city, and did it arise at the same time as one of the groups we have been considering?”

“I have no idea, Socrates,” said he, “unless perhaps it is in some need the groups themselves had for one another.” 372 a

“And perhaps you have a good point,” said I, “and we really should investigate it and not hold back. So, let us first consider the manner of life of people who are provided for in this way. Will they not make bread, wine, clothing and shoes? And having built their houses, they will work for the most part naked and unshod in summer, and in winter they will be clothed and shod well enough. They will be fed on meal and flour from the barley and wheat they are provided with, baking and kneading noble cakes and loaves, which they serve up on some reeds or clean leaves as they recline on rustic beds strewn with yew and myrtle; feasting themselves and their children, then drinking their wine, with garlands on their heads as they sing the praises of the gods; delighting in one another’s company and not begetting children beyond their resources to support them, being wary of poverty and war.” 372 b

Then Glaucon interjected.

“It seems,” said he, “that you are making these men partake of a feast devoid of relish.” 372 c

372 d “What you say is true,” said I. “I had forgotten that they will also have relish, salt of course, olives and cheese too, and they will boil up onions and greens as people in the countryside do. And we shall also provide them with desserts, I suppose, of figs, pulses and beans, and they will roast myrtle berries and acorns by the fire, sipping their wine in moderation. And so will they live out their lives, in peace and health, and when, as is likely, they die in old age, they will bequeath another such life to their descendants.”

“Well, Socrates,” said he, “if you were providing for a city of pigs, what else would you feed the beasts with?”

“But how should it be done, Glaucon?” I asked.

372 e “In the conventional manner,” said he. “People who are not going to be in discomfort should, I believe, recline on couches, dine at tables, and have various relishes available to them, the very ones they have nowadays, and desserts too.”

“Very well,” said I, “I understand. It seems we are not just considering how a city comes into existence, but how a luxurious city does so. And perhaps that is not a bad development either, for by considering something like this, we may perhaps discern how exactly justice and injustice develop in a city. Now, I think the true city is the one we have been describing, a healthy one, in a sense. 373 a But if you still want to, let us look at a city in a feverish state. There is no reason not to. In fact for some people, it seems, all this is not sufficient, nor is the lifestyle itself. They will add couches, tables and other furniture, relishes of course, perfumes, incense, courtesans and cakes, each in endless variety. And what is more, all that we first mentioned – housing, clothing and shoes – should no longer be designated as our necessities. No, we should also get painting underway, embroidery too, and we should acquire gold, ivory, and everything else like that. Is this so?”

“Yes,” said he.

373 b “In that case, will our city not need to be made bigger again? Indeed, that healthy city is no longer sufficient. It already needs to be filled out in size, with lots of things that are no longer in cities for the sake of necessity, with hunters of all sorts, for instance, imitators too, many of them concerned with shapes and colours, many concerned with music; poets too and those who serve them as rhapsodes, actors, chorus members and contractors, and artificers of a whole variety of articles for general use, and indeed for female adornment. And so, we shall also require more of these agents. Or 373 c does it not seem that we shall need people who look after children, wet nurses, nurses, beauticians, barbers, and, moreover, people to make the relishes, and cooks? And we shall still need to include swineherds, since there were none in our previous city because it didn’t need them. However, they will need to be included in this city. And it will also need a whole host of other beasts if they are to be eaten. Is this not so?”

“Inevitably.”

373 d “Once we live in this way, will we not also have a requirement for far more doctors than were needed in the previous city?”

“Far more.”

“And presumably our territory, which was once sufficient to feed the population at the time, will then become too small and sufficient no longer. Is this the case?”

“Just so,” said he.

373 e “In that case, we shall have to cut off a slice of our neighbour’s territory if we are to have enough land to pasture and plough. They in turn will do the same to ours, if they too give themselves over to the unbridled acquisition of wealth, exceeding the limit of the necessities.”

“That is quite inevitable, Socrates,” said he.

“What follows this then, Glaucon, is that we shall wage war. Is this what will happen?”

“Just so,” said he.

“And,” said I, “we really should not say anything yet as to whether war accomplishes anything

good, or anything bad either. Let us just say this much: that we have also discovered the origin of war. It originates where most of the cities' public or private evils originate, whenever they arise."

"Yes, certainly."

"Then our city must be even larger, my friend, not a little larger, but larger by an entire army, that will go forth and fight against our adversaries, in defence of all that wealth and whatever else we referred to just now." 374 a

"Why is that?" said he. "Are the citizens themselves not up to the task?"

"Not if you and the rest of us," said I, "were right to agree, when we were fashioning our city, that it is impossible for one person to practise many skills well. I presume you remember."

"What you say is true," said he.

"Well now," said I, "do you not think that warfare and combat is a skilled activity?" 374 b

"Very much so," said he.

"So, does the skill of shoemaking deserve more care than that of warfare?"

"Not at all."

"Well then, we prevented the shoemaker from attempting to be either a farmer, a weaver or a house builder at the same time, rather than just being a shoemaker, so that we would then have the job of shoemaking done properly. And we assigned one task to each one of the others in like manner, the one for which each was naturally suited, and which he was going to work at throughout his life, free from involvement in other tasks, and not missing the appropriate moment for carrying out the task well." 374 c

"So then, in the case of warfare, is it not of the utmost importance that this be carried out well? Or is it so easy that whilst engaged in farming, someone may be skilled in warfare at the same time and be practising shoemaking, or any other skill at all, although there is no one who could be sufficiently skilled, even at playing draughts or dice, who did not pursue this alone from childhood, rather than treating it as a pastime? And will someone who grabs a shield or some other piece of military equipment or weaponry be a competent combatant in warfare as a hoplite, or in some other form of combat, there and then? Grabbing any of the other tools will not make anyone a craftsman or an athlete, nor will they be of use to someone who has not got the knowledge in each case, and has not given it sufficient practice." 374 d

"If that were the case," said he, "the tools would be of enormous value."

"Then," said I, "insofar as the work of the guardians is the most important work, should it not, to that extent, be unencumbered by any other duties, and, indeed, require the utmost skill and attention?" 374 e

"Yes, I think so," said he.

"In that case, will it not also require a nature suited to the activity itself?"

"Of course."

"Then it will be our job, it seems, if we are up to it, to pick whatever natures and whatever kinds of natures are suited to the guardianship of our city."

"Our job, indeed."

"By Zeus," said I, "we have not taken on some insignificant task. Nevertheless, as long as our powers do not fail us we must not lose heart."

"Indeed we must not," said he. 375 a

"When it comes to guardianship," said I, "do you think there is any difference in nature between a noble young hound and a well-born young man?"

"In what sense do you mean?"

"For instance, each of them, presumably, needs to be keen of sense and nimble in pursuit as soon as they perceive something; strong too, if they need to fight it out with whatever they catch."

"Yes, all of this is needed," said he.

“And of course they will need courage too, if they are to fight well.”

“Of course.”

375 b “Now, would a horse, a dog, or any living creature at all that is not spirited, be prepared to exhibit courage? Or have you not noticed that when irresistible and invincible spirit is present in any soul, it is fearless in the face of anything, and unconquerable too?”

“I have noticed.”

“Well, it is obvious what the guardian should be like in bodily attributes.”

“Yes.”

“And in the case of the soul, it should obviously be spirited.”

“That too.”

“So, Glaucon,” said I, “how will they avoid being aggressive towards one another and to the other citizens when they are, by nature, people of this sort?”

“Not easily, by Zeus,” he replied.

375 c “And yet, they need to be gentle towards their own people and harsh towards their enemies or else they will not have to wait for other people to destroy them. No, they will do it themselves first.”

“True,” said he.

“So, what shall we do?” I said. “Where shall we find a character that is at once gentle and great in spirit? For the gentle nature is, presumably, opposite to the spirited.”

“Apparently.”

375 d “And yet, if someone were deprived of either of these qualities, he would never make a good guardian. And yet it seems impossible to have them both, and consequently it turns out that it is impossible to be a good guardian.”

“That is likely,” said he.

I was perplexed, and having reconsidered what had gone before, I said, “It is only right, my friend, that we are in perplexity, since we have abandoned the image we were proposing.”

“What do you mean?”

“We did not notice that there are, after all, natures that possess these opposite qualities, natures we thought did not exist.”

“Where?”

375 e “They may be seen in other animals too, and particularly in the one we were comparing to the guardian. Indeed you know, I presume, that in the case of noble dogs, their natural disposition is to be as gentle as they possibly can towards familiar people and those whom they recognise, and the very opposite towards those they do not recognise.”

“I know, indeed.”

“So, it turns out this is possible after all,” I said, “and what we are looking for in a guardian is not contrary to nature.”

“It seems not.”

“Now, in addition to being spirited, do you think our prospective guardian also needs this: to become a philosopher in his nature?”

376 a “In what way?” he asked. “I do not understand.”

“This, too,” said I, “is something you will discern in dogs, and it is worthy of admiration in these animals.”

“What is it?”

“That when he sees someone he does not recognise, he is aggressive even before he has suffered any harm at all, but when he sees someone he recognises, he welcomes them, even if they have not yet done him any good. Have you never admired this before?”

“I have not really given it much attention before now,” said he, “but it is obvious that he does something like this.”

“And yet, this is evidently a delightful characteristic of his nature, and a truly philosophic one.” 376 b

“In what way?”

“In that he distinguishes,” said I, “on sight, between friend and foe on the sole basis of having knowledge of the former and being ignorant of the latter. Indeed, how could he not be a lover of learning, when he makes a distinction between his own and what is alien, based upon knowledge and ignorance?”

“Of course,” said he, “how could he not be?”

“And surely,” said I, “the lover of learning and the lover of wisdom are the same?”

“The same, indeed,” said he.

“Should we therefore propose, with confidence, in the case of a human being too, that someone who is going to be gentle to his own and to people he knows needs to be a philosopher and a lover of learning?” 376 c

“Let us propose this,” said he.

“Then someone who is to be a noble and good guardian of the city will, according to us, be a philosopher who is spirited, swift and strong by nature.”

“Entirely so,” said he.

“Since he would be a person of this sort, in what manner will such people be reared and educated by us? And is the consideration of this question of any use to us in bringing clarity to the question that lies behind all our considerations: in what manner do justice and injustice arise in a city? We do not want the argument to be inadequate, or to make it too protracted either.” 376 d

And Glaucon’s brother said,

“Yes, I expect that this particular consideration will help in this.”

“By Zeus, Adimantus, my friend,” said I, “in that case we should not give up, even if it turns out to be a lengthy consideration.”

“We should not, indeed.”

“Come on then, let us educate these men in our discussion, as though we were telling a story and had ample leisure to do so.”

“We should.”

“So, what would their education consist of? Or is it hard to find anything better than what has been discovered through the passage of time? This, I presume, consists of physical training for the body, and music for the soul.” 376 e

“It does, indeed.”

“Well then, shall we start educating them in music prior to the physical training?”

“Why not?”

“And as part of music,” said I, “do you include verbal accounts or not?”

“I do.”

“Are there two kinds of accounts, one true, the other false?”

“Yes.”

“Should they be educated in both, beginning with the false ones?” 377 a

“I do not understand what you are saying,” said he.

“Do you not understand that we tell stories to children, at first? These, I presume, are generally speaking false, although there is truth in them too. And we make use of these stories with children before the physical training.”

“This is so.”

“Well, that is what I meant when I said that music should be taken up before physical training.”

“Rightly so,” said he.

“Do you not know that the beginning of any work is most important, especially in the case of

377 b anything young and tender, since that is when it is most malleable, and the imprint one may wish to impress upon it sinks in?”

“Yes, exactly.”

“So, shall we allow the children to hear any random stories, composed by anyone at all, and take beliefs into their soul that are, for the most part, opposite to the ones we will think they should have, once they have come of age?”

“No, we shall not allow this at all.”

377 c “Firstly, then, it seems we must watch over those who make up the stories, and we must accept whatever is well made, and reject whatever is not well made, and we shall persuade the nurses and the mothers to tell the accepted stories to the children and shape their souls with these, rather than shaping their bodies with their hands. But most of the stories that they tell nowadays should be rejected.”

“What kind of stories?” he asked.

“In looking at the greater stories,” said I, “we shall also be looking at the lesser ones. For the greater and the lesser should indeed have the same character and the same capability. Do you not think so?”

377 d “I do,” said he, “but I do not understand what you mean by the greater ones.”

“The ones that both Hesiod and Homer told us, and the other poets too, since these men presumably composed false stories which they recounted to mankind, and they still do.”

“What kind of stories?” said he. “And what aspect of them are you criticising?”

“The aspect,” said I, “which deserves most criticism primarily, and especially if someone tells the falsehoods in an ignoble manner.”

“What is this?”

377 e “It occurs when someone presents an image, in words, describing what the gods and heroes are like in an ignoble manner, like a painter who paints something that bears no resemblance to whatever he wishes to paint a likeness of.”

“Yes, indeed,” said he, “it is only right to criticise this sort of thing. But how is this done, and what are the falsehoods like?”

378 a “First and foremost,” I said, “is the greatest falsehood of all, concerning the greatest personages of all, a falsehood that its narrator recounts in an ignoble manner, according to which Uranus performed the deeds that Hesiod says he performed, and Cronus in turn took revenge on him.¹¹ But the deeds of Cronus in particular, and what he suffered at the hands of his son, these, even if they were true, should not, I believe, be recounted freely and easily to unreflective young folk. No, they are best kept quiet. And if someone does need to relate them, they should be heard in secret by as few people as possible, after sacrificing not some common piglet, but an enormous beast that is hard to procure, so that the least possible number of people get to hear them.”

“Yes, indeed,” said he. “These accounts really are hard to take.”

378 b “Yes, and they should not be told,” said I, “in this city of ours, Adimantus. Nor should it be said, within earshot of the young, that there is nothing out of the ordinary in acting unjustly in the extreme, nor again in punishing a father for his unjust actions in all sorts of ways, since in so doing he would be doing what the foremost and most important gods have done.”

“No, by Zeus,” said he. “I myself do not think they are suitable material either.”

378 c “Nor,” said I, “should it be said that gods are at war with gods, and are scheming and fighting, since this is not true either. Indeed, if we want those who are to guard our city to consider it a disgrace to hate one another easily, then we should not tell or depict stories of the battles of gods and giants – far from it – or stories of a whole variety of other enmities of gods and heroes with their kindred and family members. But if we are somehow going to persuade them that no citizen so far has hated another citizen, and that it is unholy to do so, then this sort of thing must indeed be said

to the young by old men and women, and, as they get older, the poets should be compelled to compose speeches for them, adhering closely to this. 378 d

“Stories of Hera being tied up by her son, and Hephaestus being flung out of heaven by his father for trying to defend his mother when she was being beaten, and any battles of the gods that Homer has made up, these should not be admitted into our city, whether they have a deeper meaning or not. For the young person is unable to distinguish what is a deeper meaning and what is not, and whatever he incorporates into his beliefs at that age tends to become difficult to eradicate or undo. Surely then, for all these reasons, we should ensure above all that the very first stories they hear are the noblest stories they could possibly hear for the development of excellence.” 378 e

“Yes, that makes sense,” said he. “But if someone were to press the point and ask us what we are referring to and what the stories are, what stories would we mention?”

And I said, “At the moment, Adimantus, you and I are not poets but founders of a city. Now, it is appropriate that the founders know the guidelines within which the poets should compose stories, and from which they should not deviate when they are composing. But it is not appropriate that the founders themselves make up stories.” 379 a

“That is right,” said he, “but the question is what would be the guidelines in relation to descriptions of the gods?”

“Somewhat as follows, I presume,” said I. “The god should, of course, always be portrayed as he really is, whether a poet presents him in an epic, a lyric, or in a tragic work.”

“Yes, that should always be the case.”

“And since the god is actually good, should he not be spoken of as such?” 379 b

“Of course.”

“And, indeed, nothing that is good is harmful, is it?”

“I do not think so.”

“Now, can that which is not harmful do any harm?”

“Not at all.”

“And can that which is not harmful do anything bad?”

“No, it cannot do that either.”

“Yes, and whatever does nothing bad could not be the cause of anything bad either, could it?”

“No, how could it?”

“What about this? Is that which is good, beneficial?”

“Yes.”

“In that case, is it the cause of things going well?”

“Yes.”

“So, what is good is not the cause of everything. No, it is the cause of all that is well, but it is not the cause of bad things.”

“Entirely so,” said he. 379 c

“So, since the god is good,” I said, “he would not be the cause of everything, as most people say. No, to humanity he is the cause of very little, and there is a great deal he is not responsible for. Indeed, with us, what is bad far exceeds what is good, and we should declare that no one else is the cause of what is good except the god, and we should seek elsewhere for the causes of what is bad, and not blame the god.”

“I think,” said he, “that what you are saying is entirely true.”

“In that case,” said I, “we should not accept, from Homer or any other poet, this error about the gods, when he foolishly makes the mistake of saying that two pitchers 379 d

¹¹ Hesiod, *Theogony* 154–210, 453–506.

*Stand on the floor of Zeus' abode
They are filled with fates;
One with good, the other with wretched.*

And he to whom Zeus gives a mixture of both

Sometimes meets with bad, sometimes with good

But he to whom Zeus gives, from the second jar, unmixed

Foul misery drives him over the divine earth.

379 e Nor that Zeus is our steward of 'good and bad alike'.¹²

380 a "As for Pandarus and the violation of oaths and truces, if anyone says that Athena and Zeus brought this about they will not receive our praise, nor if they say that strife and contention of gods was caused by Themis and Zeus, nor indeed should we allow the young to hear, as Aeschylus maintains, that

*God implants the cause in mortal men,
When he wants to utterly destroy a house.*¹³

380 b "If someone includes these lines in a play about the sufferings of Niobe, or of the family of Pelops, or of the Trojan war,¹⁴ or anything else like that, he should not be allowed to say that these are brought about by a god. And if they are to say this, they must come up with an argument, similar to the one we are looking for, and declare that the god was doing what was just and good, and the sufferers derived benefit from being chastised. But the poet should not be allowed to say that those who paid this penalty were wretched, and the one who did all this was a god. But if he were to say that they were in need of chastisement because bad people are wretched and derive benefit from being made to pay a penalty by the god, that should be allowed. But the statement that a god is the cause of bad to anyone who is good must be opposed. We must do battle, by every possible means, against anyone saying this in his own city, if that city is to be well governed, or against anyone, young or old, even hearing such stories told, in verse or in prose, because if they were spoken they would be unholy utterances, of no advantage to us, not even concordant with themselves."

380 c "On this law," said he, "I am casting my vote with you, and I am pleased to do so."

"Well," said I, "this would be one of the laws and guidelines concerning gods, on the basis of which the speakers will have to speak and the poets write their poems. The god is not the cause of everything, but only of what is good."

"And that," said he, "is surely enough."

380 d "Well, what about a second one as follows? Do you think that the god is a beguiler who can contrive to appear in different forms at different times, sometimes actually changing his own form and passing into various shapes, at other times deceiving us and making us believe that this sort of thing is happening to him? Or is the god simple, and least likely of all to go away from his own form?"

"I am unable," said he, "to give you a direct answer at the moment."

380 e "What about this? If anything is to depart from its own form, must it not be changed either by itself or by something else?"

"It must."

381 a "Is it not the case that whatever is in the best condition is least subject to alteration and change by something else? For example, although a body is altered by food, drink and physical work, and any plant is altered by sunlight, the wind and other influences of this sort, the one that is healthiest and strongest is least subject to alteration, is it not?"

"Of course."

"And would not the bravest and most reflective soul be least troubled and subject to alteration by some external influence?"

“Yes.”

“And presumably, in the case of all manufactured items too – equipment, buildings or garments – by the same argument those that are well made and in good condition are least liable to alteration by the passage of time, and any other influences.”

“Yes, this is so.”

“Then anything that is in good condition, by nature or by design or both, is most resistant to transformation by something else.” 381 b

“So it seems.”

“But surely the god, and what belongs to the god, is in the best possible condition in every way?”

“Of course.”

“So in this respect, the god would be least inclined to adopt a lot of shapes.”

“Least, indeed.”

“In that case, would he transform and alter himself?”

“Of course,” said he, “if he is actually altered.”

“So, does he change himself into something better and nobler, or into something worse and more base than himself?”

“If he actually changes,” said he, “it must be into something worse, for we surely shall not maintain that the god is deficient either in nobility or excellence.” 381 c

“What you are saying is absolutely correct,” said I. “And this being the case, do you think, Adimantus, that anyone, god or man, would willingly make himself worse in any respect?”

“Impossible,” said he.

“So it seems impossible,” said I, “even for a god, to wish to change himself. Rather, being as noble and excellent as it is possible to be, each of them always remains eternally in his own shape, purely and simply.”

“Well, that seems absolutely necessary to me.”

“So, best of men,” said I, “none of the poets should tell us that 381 d

Gods in the likeness of strangers

*Assume all sorts of disguises, as they visit our cities.*¹⁵

“Nor speak falsely of Proteus and Thetis, nor introduce Hera in a tragedy, or any other works, transforming herself into a priestess, gathering alms for

*The life-giving sons of Inachos, the river of Argos.*¹⁶

“And there are many other falsehoods of this sort that they should not tell us. Nor again should mothers, misled by these fellows, terrify their children by telling them bad stories in which some gods actually go about at night looking like various strangers of all sorts, lest the mothers speak ill of the gods, and at the same time make their children more cowardly.” 381 e

“No, they should not do that,” said he.

“But is it the case,” said I, “that although the gods themselves cannot undergo transformation, they make us think that they appear in lots of different guises, thus deceiving and beguiling us?”

“Perhaps,” said he.

“What about this?” said I. “Would a god be prepared to practise deception, either in word or in deed, by putting forth an appearance?” 382 a

“I do not know,” said he.

¹² The first three quotes are from *Iliad* xxiv.527-532. The source of the fourth quote is unknown.

¹³ Athena is depicted encouraging Pandarus to violate oaths at *Iliad* iv.73-103. This Aeschylus quote is of unknown origin.

¹⁴ This is likely a reference to works of Aeschylus in a play called *Niobe*, only fragments of which survive.

¹⁵ *Odyssey* xvii.485-486.

¹⁶ Inachos was a river god and king of Argos. The source of the line quoted here is unknown.

“Do you not know,” said I, “that the true falsehood, if I may use such an expression, is hated by all gods and all humans?”

“How do you mean?” he asked.

“As follows,” said I. “No one is prepared willingly to be deceived in what is presumably the most important part of themselves, about the most important matters. No, we are afraid most of all to have falsehood reside there.”

“I still do not understand,” said he.

382 b “That is because you think I am saying something profound,” said I. “I am just saying that being deceived in the soul in relation to things that are, and to have been deceived and be ignorant, and hold falsehood there and have it reside there is what everyone would find least acceptable, and it is in this case that they most detest falsehood.”

“Very much so,” said he.

382 c “Then what I was saying just now was quite right. This ignorance in the soul of the person who is deceived may be called a true lie. For the falsehood in words is an imitation of the experience in the soul, an image that has arisen subsequently, and so it is not unadulterated falsehood. Is this not so?”

“Entirely so.”

“Then the actual falsehood is hated, not only by the gods but by humanity too.”

“I think so.”

382 d “But what about the falsehood in words? When and for whom is this useful, so that it does not merit our hatred? Is it not when it is used against enemies, or when some among the people we call friends, through madness or ignorance, are attempting to do some bad deed, and falsehood then becomes useful as a sort of medicine to prevent this? And in the stories we were speaking of just now, because we do not know the truth concerning events of the distant past, do we not make falsehood resemble the truth as best we can, and render it useful by so doing?”

“Yes, indeed,” said he, “that is what happens.”

“So then, in which respect would the falsehood be useful to the god? Is it because he does not know about past events, and therefore makes up falsehoods that resemble them?”

“That would be quite ridiculous,” said he.

“In that case, there is nothing of the deceiving poet in a god.”

“I do not think so.”

“Would he make up falsehoods because he is afraid of his enemies?”

382 e “Far from it.”

“Would he do it because of ignorance or madness among those who are close to him?”

“No,” said he, “no one who is ignorant or mad is beloved of god.”

“So, there is no reason for the god to make up falsehoods.”

“There is not.”

“So, divinity and the divine are entirely devoid of falsehood.”

“Entirely so,” said he.

“So, the god is absolutely simple and true, in word and in deed, and he neither changes himself nor deceives others, awake or in a dream, through appearances, words or signs.”

383 a “Now that you say so,” said he, “that is how it looks to me too.”

“In that case, do you agree that this is a second guideline by which we should speak and write poems about the gods? They are not enchanters who transform themselves, nor do they lead us astray with falsehoods through their words or their actions.”

“I agree.”

383 b “So, although we praise a great deal that is in Homer, we shall not praise the part where Zeus sends that dream to Agamemnon, nor shall we praise Aeschylus when he has Thetis say that Apollo sang at her wedding, ‘to celebrate her goodly race of children’,

*Their days prolonged, from pain and sickness free,
And rounding out the tale of heaven's blessings,
Raised the proud paeon, making glad my heart.
And I believed that Phoebus' mouth divine,
Filled with the breath of prophecy, could not lie.
But he himself, the singer, himself who sat
At meat with us, himself who promised all,
Is now himself the slayer of my son.¹⁷*

“Whenever someone says anything like this about the gods, we shall be angry with him and refuse 383 c
to grant a chorus, nor shall we allow teachers to make use of this for the education of the young
folk, if our guardians are going to become as god-revering and divine as it is possible for a human
being to be.”

“I agree entirely with these guidelines,” said he, “and I would use them as laws.”

¹⁷ In *Iliad* ii.1-34, Zeus sends a dream to Agamemnon with the false promise of victory if he lays siege to Troy immediately. The source of the Aeschylus quote is unknown. Trans. Shorey; Loeb edition of the *Republic*.