



Republic

— BOOK I —

<i>narrator:</i>	<i>SOCRATES</i>	<i>of Alopece, son of Sophroniscus</i>
<i>persons in the dialogue:</i>	<i>GLAUCON</i>	<i>Plato's brother</i>
	<i>POLEMARCHUS</i>	<i>son of Cephalus</i>
	<i>UNNAMED SLAVE</i>	<i>from Polemarchus' household</i>
	<i>ADIMANTUS</i>	<i>Plato's brother</i>
	<i>THRASYMACHUS</i>	<i>a rhetorician and diplomat from Chalcedon</i>
	<i>CLITOPHON</i>	<i>an oligarchic political leader</i>
	<i>CEPHALUS</i>	<i>from Sicily, a successful shield manufacturer in the Piraeus</i>
<i>also present:</i>	<i>NICERATUS</i>	<i>father of Nicias, a general and political leader</i>
	<i>EUTHYDEMUS</i>	<i>brother of Lysias</i>
	<i>LYSIAS</i>	<i>an orator, son of Cephalus</i>
	<i>OTHERS</i>	<i>friends attending the festival</i>
	<i>CHARMANTIDES</i>	<i>a contemporary of Cephalus</i>
<i>scenes:</i>		<i>on the road to Athens during the Bendis festival</i>
		<i>/ at the house of Polemarchus in the Piraeus</i>

I went down yesterday to the Piraeus with Glaucon, the son of Ariston,¹ to offer my prayers to the goddess,² and also because I wanted to see how they would conduct the festival, since they were celebrating it for the first time. Now, although I thought the procession of the local people was beautiful indeed, the one that the Thracians put on seemed to suit the occasion just as well. Having offered our prayers and seen what we had come to see, we departed for the city. Then, as we were heading homewards, Polemarchus, the son of Cephalus, ordered his slave to run after us and order us to wait, and once the slave had caught hold of my cloak from behind, he said, "Polemarchus is ordering you to wait." So I turned around and asked where the man himself was.

"He is coming up behind me," he replied. "Just wait."

"Wait we will," said Glaucon.

And a little later Polemarchus arrived, with Glaucon's brother Adimantus,³ Niceratus, the son of Nicias, and some others, apparently coming from the procession. Then Polemarchus said, "Socrates, I assume you two are heading back to the city and leaving us."

"Not a bad assumption," said I.

¹ Glaucon, son of Ariston, was Plato's older brother.

² This is a reference to the Thracian lunar goddess Bendis, a cult to whom had recently developed in the Piraeus, a harbour town and the main port of Athens.

³ Adimantus, son of Ariston, was an older brother of Plato.

“Well,” said he, “do you see how many of us there are?”

“Of course I do.”

“Then,” said he, “you should either grow stronger than all of these men, or stay here.”

“Is there not another option?” said I. “Could we not persuade you that you should let us leave?”

“And would you be able to persuade us,” said he, “if we were not listening to you?”

“Not at all,” replied Glaucon.

“Then you should presume that we will not listen.”

328 a And Adimantus said, “Well, do you not know that towards evening there will be a torch race on horseback in honour of the goddess?”

“On horseback?” said I. “That is novel indeed. Will they carry torches and pass them to one another whilst racing their horses? Is this what you mean?”

“That is it,” said Polemarchus. “And what is more, they will be performing an all-night festival that will be worth seeing. Yes, we are going to go out after supper and watch the night festival, and lots of young people will be with us there, and lots of conversation too. So stay, you really must.”

328 b

And Glaucon said, “It seems we should stay.”

“Well, if that is how it seems,” said I, “that is what we must do.”

So we went to Polemarchus’ house, and there we met Polemarchus’ brothers, Lysias⁴ and Euthydemus, and indeed Thrasymachus the Chalcedonian, Charmantides the Paeanian, and Clitophon,⁵ the son of Aristonymus.⁶ Polemarchus’ father, Cephalus,⁷ was also in there and he seemed very old to me, as it was indeed some time since I had seen him. He was seated upon a sort of seat with a cushion, with his head in garlands because he had just performed a sacrifice in the courtyard. So we sat down beside him, for some seats were arranged there in a circle.

328 c

Now, as soon as Cephalus saw me, he greeted me and said, “Socrates, you do not often come down to the Piraeus to see us, but you should. Yes, if I were still able to make my way to the city easily there would be no need for you to come here, since we could go to you. But nowadays you should come here more frequently since I must say that for me, at least, as the other pleasures, the bodily ones, lose their intensity, the desires and pleasures associated with discussions increase all the more. So you must do this. Be a companion to these young men and visit us here frequently, as though we were your friends and closest kin.”

328 d

“Very well, Cephalus,” said I. “In fact, I enjoy conversing with people who are very old. I think we need to learn from them, as though they had traversed a road on which we too will surely have to proceed. What is it like? Is it rough and difficult or is it easy and smooth? What is more, I would love to find out from you how you see this, since you are already at the time of life that the poets call ‘old age’s threshold’.⁸ Is life difficult? Or how do you describe it?”

328 e

“I will tell you, by Zeus, Socrates,” said he, “how it looks to me. Yes, some of us, men of our age, often gather together in accordance with the old proverb ‘like to like’.⁹ Now, when we gather, most of us moan, as we long for the lost pleasures of youth and reminisce about love-making, drinking parties and feasts, and whatever goes along with this sort of thing, and we get distressed as though we had been deprived of something important, and that then we lived well but now we are not even alive. Some bewail the contemptuous treatment of old age by their own kinfolk, and so they go on about the amount of trouble old age causes them. But I think, Socrates, that these people are blaming the wrong cause. For if this were the cause, I would also have been affected in the very same way, as far as old age is concerned, and so would everyone else who had reached this stage of life. But I have already met others who are not in this predicament, and indeed

329 b

when someone asked the poet, Sophocles,¹⁰ in my presence, ‘How are you getting on, Sophocles, when it comes to making love? Are you still able to have intercourse with a woman?’ And he replied, ‘Mind what you say, my man. I am glad beyond measure to have escaped this. It is like escaping from a raving and savage slave master.’ I thought at the time that he expressed this quite

329 c

well, and I still think so now. For all in all, with old age comes much peace, and a freedom from this sort of thing. When the desires cease their strain and relax, what Sophocles described really does come to pass. It is a release from a whole host of maniacal slave masters. But in these situations, and in the case of problems with family members, there is only one explanation, and it is not old age, Socrates, but the manner of the people. If they are orderly and contented, then old age is wearisome, but in measure. If not, then for someone of this sort, old age, Socrates, and youth too, turn out to be difficult.” 329 d

Well, I was delighted with him for saying all this, and because I wanted him to say more I drew him out by asking, “Cephalus, I think that when you say this, most people do not accept your answer. They think, rather, that you bear your old age with ease, not because of your manner but because you have acquired a lot of wealth, for they say that wealthy people have consolation in abundance.” 329 e

“What you say is true,” said he. “They do not accept it and they do have a point, but not as much as they imagine. Yet the response of Themistocles¹¹ puts this nicely. He was being reviled by the man from Seriphos, who said that Themistocles was not well regarded because of himself, but because of his city. He replied that he himself would not have become famous had he been from Seriphos, nor would that other man had he been from Athens. And the same argument applies to those who are not wealthy and bear old age with difficulty. A reasonable man would not bear old age accompanied by poverty with much ease, nor would an unreasonable man who had become wealthy ever become content with himself.” 330 a

“Cephalus,” said I, “did you inherit most of what you have or did you acquire it yourself?”

“Are you asking what I have acquired, Socrates? As a money-maker, I am sort of midway between my grandfather and my father. For my grandfather, whose name I bear, having inherited about as much wealth as I have now acquired, made many times as much as this again. Then my own father, Lysanias, reduced the wealth below its present value, while I would be pleased if I could leave just as much as I inherited to these lads here, and a little more besides.” 330 b

“The reason I ask,” said I, “is because you do not seem to be extremely fond of money, and this is in general the case with those who have not acquired the money themselves, while those who have acquired it are twice as attached to it as anyone else. Indeed, just as poets are fond of their own poems, and fathers of their sons, those who make money are serious about money in the same way, seeing it as a production of their own, and also, like everyone else, because of its usefulness. So they are difficult people to be with, since they are not prepared to speak positively of anything except wealth.” 330 c

“That is true,” he said.

“It certainly is,” said I. “But tell me something else. What do you think is the greatest good you have enjoyed from the acquisition of so much wealth?” 330 d

“What I say,” he replied, “would probably not persuade many people. For mark my words, Socrates,” said he, “once someone begins to think he is about to die, fears and concerns occur to him about issues that had not occurred to him previously. For the stories told about people in Hades, that someone who has acted unjustly whilst here must pay a penalty when he arrives there,

⁴ Lysias was a famous speechwriter and orator. In Plato’s *Phaedrus*, the eponymous character is depicted as having come from a conversation with Lysias.

⁵ Thrasymachus was a sophist from Chalcedon who is also mentioned in Plato’s *Phaedrus*.

⁶ Clitophon was an oligarch and statesman. There is a potentially spurious Platonic dialogue that bears his name.

⁷ Cephalus was a wealthy Syracusan arms manufacturer who lived in Athens.

⁸ *Iliad* xxii.60, xxiv.487; *Odyssey* xv.246, 348, xxiii.212.

⁹ *Odyssey* xvii.218.

¹⁰ Sophocles was an Athenian tragedian.

¹¹ Themistocles was an Athenian politician and general.

330 e stories that were laughable before then torment his soul at that stage, for fear they might be true. And he himself, either on account of weakness born of old age or because of being, in a sense, already closer to whatever is there, has a better view of this, and so he becomes full of foreboding and fear, and he then starts thinking about this and considering whether he has done any injustice to anyone. Someone who discovers that he himself has done a lot of injustice during his life often
331 a awakens from sleep, terrified, like a child, and he lives his life in anticipation of evil. While to someone who is aware in himself of nothing unjust, a pleasant, good anticipation is ever present, ‘a nurse in his old age’, as Pindar says.¹² Yes, Socrates, the poet expressed this in a delightful manner, explaining that for someone who has spent his life in justice and holiness:

*Sweet anticipation accompanies him
Fostering his heart, a nurse in his old age,
Chief ruler of mortal thought
With its many twists and turns.*

“He puts it so well. Truly wonderful! So in this respect, I propose that the acquisition of
331 b money is most worthwhile, not for everybody, but for the reasonable man. Indeed, the possession of wealth has a major role to play in ensuring that one does not cheat or deceive someone intentionally or, again, depart to that other world in fear because some sacrifices are still owed to a god, or some money to another person. Now, it also has many other uses, and yet setting one against the other, I would propose, Socrates, that this is not the least significant purpose for which wealth is most useful to a man of intelligence.”

331 c “That is most beautifully expressed, Cephalus,” said I. “But this thing itself, justice, shall we say without qualification that it is truthfulness, and giving back what has been taken from someone else? Or can these very actions sometimes be performed justly and sometimes unjustly? For instance, if someone took weapons from a friend when the man was of sound mind, and he then went mad and asked for them back, everyone would, presumably, agree that one should not give them back, and that the person returning them would not be just. Nor again would the person who was prepared to speak the entire truth to someone in such a condition be just either.”

331 d “That is right,” said he.

“So this is not a definition of justice: to speak the truth and give back what one has taken.”

“It certainly is, Socrates,” said Polemarchus, interrupting, “at least if we are to believe Simonides.”¹³

“Yes, indeed,” said Cephalus, “I am now handing the argument over to you, since it is time for me to look after the rituals.”

“Am I not the inheritor of whatever is yours in any case?” said Polemarchus.

“You certainly are,” he said with a laugh, and with that he left for the rituals.

331 e “Then tell me,” said I, “you, the inheritor of the argument, what do you say Simonides says, and says correctly, about justice?”

“That it is just,” said Polemarchus, “to give back what is owed to each person. In saying this he is, in my view, expressing it nicely.”

332 a “Well,” said I, “it certainly is not easy to disbelieve Simonides, for he is a wise and divine man. But although you probably appreciate what precisely he is saying, Polemarchus, I do not understand it. For he is obviously not speaking about what we were describing earlier: giving back something that has been deposited to anyone at all who is not of sound mind when he asks for it, although what has been deposited is presumably owed. Is this so?”

“Yes.”

“Yet it should not be given back, under any circumstances, when someone of unsound mind asks for it.”

“True,” said he.

“Then when Simonides says that giving back what is owed is just, he is not referring to this sort of thing but to something else.”

“Something else indeed, by Zeus,” said he, “for he thinks that what friends owe to friends is to do them some good, and nothing bad.”

“I understand,” said I. “Whoever gives gold back to someone who deposited it is not giving back what is owed if the giving back or the taking turns out to be harmful, and the one who hands it over and the one who gives it back are friends. Is this what Simonides means, according to you?” 332 b

“Yes, certainly.”

“What about enemies? Should we give back whatever happens to be owed to them?”

“Entirely so,” he replied, “whatever is owed to them. And what is owed from one enemy to another one, and what is appropriate too, is something bad.”

“In that case,” said I, “it seems Simonides was speaking in riddles, as poets do, when he spoke of what is just. For apparently he had in mind that what is just is this: ‘giving back what is appropriate to each’. But to this he gave the name ‘what is owed’.” 332 c

“What else do you think?” said he.

“By Zeus,” said I, “if someone had asked him, ‘Simonides, the skill called medicine is one that gives back. But what is owed and appropriate, and to what does it give this?’ What answer do you think he would have given us?”

“Obviously,” said he, “it is the skill that gives medicines, food and drink to bodies.”

“What about the skill called cookery? What is owed and appropriate, and to what does it give this?”

“It is the one that gives seasoning to dishes.” 332 d

“Very well. And the skill that could be called justice gives what to what?”

“Socrates,” said he, “if we are to adhere at all to what we were just saying, it is the skill that gives benefit back to friends and harm back to enemies.”

“So is he saying that justice is doing good to friends and bad to enemies?”

“I think so.”

“When it comes to disease and health, who is most capable of doing good to sick friends and harm to sick enemies?”

“A physician.”

“And who is most capable of doing so to those who are sailing and facing the danger of the sea?” 332 e

“A ship’s pilot.”

“And what about the just man? In what activity or in relation to what task is he most capable of benefiting friends and harming enemies?”

“In waging war and in forming alliances, in my opinion at least.”

“Very well. Now, to those who are not sick, dear Polemarchus, a physician is of no use.”

“True.”

“And a ship’s pilot is of no use to those who are not sailing.”

“Yes.”

“So a just man too is of no use to those who are not waging war.”

“That is not really how it seems to me.”

“Then justice is also useful in time of peace?” 333 a

“Yes, it is useful.”

¹² Pindar was a lyric poet from Thebes who lived a generation before Plato. Fragment 214, Snell.

¹³ Simonides was a lyric poet from the island of Ceos. One of his poems serves as a basis for discussion in Plato’s *Protagoras*.

“And so is farming, is it not?”

“Yes.”

“For providing us with the fruits of the earth?”

“Yes.”

“And so too is shoe-making.”

“Yes.”

“For providing us with shoes. I presume that is what you would say?”

“Entirely so.”

“And what about justice? What would you say it is useful for in time of peace? For the use of or the acquisition of what?”

“For contractual arrangements, Socrates.”

“And by contractual arrangements, do you mean partnerships or something else?”

“Yes, partnerships indeed.”

333 b “Well, is the just man also a good and useful partner when it comes to placing draughts on a board, or is it the draughts-player?”

“It is the draughts-player.”

“But when it comes to the placement of bricks and stones, is the just man a more useful and better partner than the house builder?”

“Not at all.”

“Well, in what sort of partnership is the just man a better partner than the harpist, in the same way that the harpist is a better partner than the just man when it comes to striking the strings?”

“Well, in my opinion, it is when it comes to money.”

333 c “Except perhaps when it comes to spending the money, Polemarchus. When it is necessary, in partnership, to buy or sell a horse, then I presume a horse-trainer is better. Is this so?”

“Apparently.”

“And when it is a ship, is a shipwright or ship’s pilot better?”

“So it seems.”

“So, when is the just man more useful than others? When the silver or gold is to be used in partnership for what purpose?”

“When it is to be placed on deposit and kept safe, Socrates.”

“Do you mean when no use is to be made of it and it is to lie idle?”

“Entirely so.”

333 d “So when money is not used, that is when justice is useful to it?”

“Quite likely.”

“And when a pruning hook is to be guarded, justice is useful both in partnership and privately, but when it is to be used, the skill of the vine-dresser is useful?”

“Apparently.”

“Will you also say that when a shield or a lyre are to be guarded and not used, justice is useful, but when they are to be used, military or musical skill is useful?”

“It must be so.”

“And, indeed, in all other cases, is justice of no use when it comes to using each of them, and is it useful when not using them?”

“Quite likely.”

333 e “Well, my friend, justice would not really be of any great consequence if it turned out to be useful only for things that are not being used. But let us consider this. Consider the person who is most skilled at landing a blow in a fight, whether in a boxing match or in any other situation. Is he not also the one who is most skilled at guarding against a blow?”

“Entirely so.”

“And is someone who is skilled in guarding against disease also the one who is most skilled at engendering it without being noticed?”

“Well, I think so.”

“Then again, if someone is a good guardian of an army, is the same person also good at stealing the enemy’s plans and manoeuvres?” 334 a

“Entirely so.”

“Then someone who is a skilled guardian of something is also a skilled thief of that?”

“So it seems.”

“So, if the just man is clever at guarding money, he will be clever at stealing it too?”

“That is what this argument indicates, at any rate,” said he.

“Then, it seems the just man has turned out to be a kind of thief, and it is quite likely that you learned this from Homer. In fact, he admires Odysseus’ maternal grandfather, Autolycus, and says he surpassed all of humanity in theft and in perjury.¹⁴ So it seems that justice, according to you, Homer, and Simonides, is a kind of theft, although it is for the benefit of friends and to the detriment of enemies. Is this not what you meant?” 334 b

“No, by Zeus,” he said. “In fact, I no longer know what I meant. And yet, I am still of the opinion that justice benefits friends and harms enemies.”

“And by someone’s friends, do you mean those who seem to that person to be worthy people, or those who actually are so, even though they do not seem so? And does the same apply to enemies?” 334 c

“Well, someone is likely to be friendly towards people he believes to be worthy, and to hate those he believes to be bad.”

“Now, do not people make mistakes about this, so that lots of people seem to them to be worthy when they are not, and vice versa?”

“Yes, they make mistakes.”

“So to those who make mistakes, are the good people their enemies, while the bad people are their friends?”

“Entirely so.”

“But in that case is it just, nevertheless, for them to benefit the bad people and to harm the good people?”

“Apparently so.”

“And yet, those who are good at any rate are just, and are not the sort of people to act unjustly.” 334 d

“True.”

“Then according to your argument, it is just to act badly towards those who do no injustice.”

“Not at all, Socrates,” said he. “Indeed, the argument seems to be a bad one.”

“In that case,” said I, “is it just to harm those who are unjust and to benefit those who are just?”

“This sounds better than that other conclusion.”

“So, Polemarchus, in the many cases where people make mistakes about their fellow men, it will turn out that it is just to harm their friends, for they have bad friends, and on the other hand to benefit their enemies, for their enemies are good. And so we shall be saying the exact opposite of what we said Simonides is saying.” 334 e

“Very much so.” said he. “That is how it turns out. But let us make a change, since it is quite likely that we have not defined friend and enemy correctly.”

“In what way, Polemarchus?”

“In saying that someone who seems worthy is a friend.”

“And how should we change this now?” I asked.

“Someone who seems to be, and actually is, worthy is a friend. But someone who seems to

¹⁴ *Odyssey* xix.392-398.

335 a be worthy, but is not so, seems to be a friend but is not a friend. And we should make the same proposal in relation to an enemy.”

“Then, by this argument it seems, the good person will be a friend and the bad person an enemy.”
 “Yes.”

“Are you asking us to make an addition to our account of what is just? At first we said it was just to do good to a friend and bad to an enemy, but you are now asking us to add to this and say that it is just to do good to a friend who is good, and harm to an enemy who is bad?”

335 b “Yes, certainly,” he said. “I think that would be a very nice way to express it.”

“Now,” said I, “is it befitting a just man to harm any person at all?”

“Yes, certainly,” said he. “He should harm those who are bad and who are enemies too.”

“But when horses are harmed, do they become better or worse?”

“Worse.”

“And is this in relation to the excellence that belongs to dogs or to horses?”

“In relation to the excellence that belongs to horses.”

“And when dogs too are harmed, do they not become worse, in the excellence that belongs to dogs and not in the excellence that belongs to horses?”

“Necessarily.”

335 c “And accordingly, my friend, should we not say that when human beings are harmed, they become worse in terms of human excellence?”

“Yes, certainly.”

“And justice, is it not human excellence?”

“This too is necessarily so.”

“And in that case, human beings who are harmed necessarily become more unjust.”

“So it seems.”

“Now, are musicians able to make people unmusical by their musicianship?”

“Impossible.”

“Is it possible for horsemen to turn people into non-horsemen by their horsemanship?”

“It is not.”

335 d “Well then, can the just men make people unjust by means of their justice? Or, in short, can the good people make people bad by means of their excellence?”

“No, that is impossible.”

“Indeed it is, I think, not the function of heat to cool things down, but of its opposite.”

“Yes.”

“Nor is it the function of dryness to moisten things, but of its opposite.”

“Entirely so.”

“Nor is it the function of good to do harm, but of its opposite.”

“Apparently.”

“And the just man is good.”

“Entirely so.”

“So it is not the function of the just person to harm either a friend or anyone else, Polemarchus. No, that is the function of his opposite, the unjust person.”

335 e “I think you are speaking the truth, Socrates,” said he, “entirely so.”

“So, if someone maintains that it is just to give back what is owed to each, and by this he means that harm is owed to enemies by the just man, and benefit is owed to friends, the person saying this was not wise for he did not speak the truth, since it has become evident to us that there are no circumstances in which it is just to harm anyone.”

“I concur,” said he.

“Then you and I shall do battle,” said I, “in partnership, if anyone maintains that Simonides or

Bias or Pittacus,¹⁵ or any other wise and blessed man, has said so.”

“Well, I am ready,” said he, “to be your partner in the battle.”

“But,” I said, “do you know who, it seems to me, is the originator of this maxim, the one that maintains that it is just to benefit one’s friends and harm one’s enemies?” 336 a

“Who?” he asked.

“I think it is a maxim of Periander or Perdiccas or Xerxes or Ismenias the Theban,¹⁶ or some other rich man who thinks he has great power.”

“What you say is very true,” said he.

“Very well,” said I. “But since it has become evident that this is not justice, or what is just, what else might someone say that it is?”

Now, even while we were conversing, Thrasymachus made several efforts to take control of the discussion, but he was prevented from doing so by the people sitting beside him who wanted to hear the discussion. But as we had paused, and I had asked this question, he held his peace no longer. Gathering himself up like a wild beast, he came at us as though he would tear us to pieces. Polemarchus and I were panic-stricken with fear, as he roared out in our midst. “What is this nonsense,” said he, “that has taken hold of you for so long, Socrates? And why are you both fooling around and giving way to one another? Yes, if you really want to know what it is that is just, do not just ask questions or try your best to refute someone when they give you an answer, knowing full well that it is easier to ask questions than to answer them. Answer the question yourself and say what it is that is just according to you. And do not tell me that it is ‘what is needed’ or ‘what is beneficial’ or ‘profitable’ or ‘expedient’ or ‘advantageous’. Just tell me clearly and precisely what it is, for I will not accept your answer if you propose this sort of nonsense.” 336 b

Now, when I heard him, I was shocked, and looking at him in terror I thought that if I had not seen him before he saw me, I would have been struck dumb. But as it happened, once the argument had begun to make him mad, I looked at him first, and so I was able to answer him, and I said, with a slight tremble in my voice, “Thrasymachus, do not be so harsh with us, for if Polemarchus here and I are making mistakes in considering the argument, rest assured that our mistakes are unintentional. If we were searching for gold we would never give way to one another deliberately in the search, and ruin our chances of finding it. So you certainly should not presume that in searching for justice, something more precious than a lot of gold, we would then give way to one another in this mindless manner and not be serious about bringing it fully to light. Do not make that presumption, my friend. No, in my opinion we lack the ability, so it is surely far more reasonable that you clever people have mercy on us rather than being harsh.” 336 c

And when he heard this he broke into scornful laughter. “By Heracles,” said he, “there it is, the familiar irony of Socrates. Indeed, I predicted this already. Yes, I told these people that you would not be willing to answer questions and would speak ironically and do anything rather than answer the question someone asked you.” 336 e

“You are indeed wise, Thrasymachus,” said I. “So you knew full well that if you were to ask someone how much twelve is, and if you were to introduce your question by saying to him, ‘Do not tell me, my man, that twelve is twice six, or three times four, or six times two, or that it is four times three, because I will not accept your answer if you talk such nonsense as this,’ I am sure it is obvious to you that no one could answer your question if you were to put it like that.” 337 a

¹⁵ Bias of Priene was a wise man renowned for his probity. Pittacus was a military general from Mytilene on the island of Lesbos. Bias and Pittacus were two of the Seven Sages of Greece, a group of 7th-6th-century philosophers and statesmen who were known for their wisdom.

¹⁶ Periander, Perdiccas and Xerxes were tyrants from Greece and Persia. Ismenias was a Theban politician who managed to amass a great deal of money.

But if he responded to you, ‘Thrasymachus, what are you saying? Can I not give a single one of the answers you mentioned? That is amazing! Even if one of them happens to be the answer, should I say something other than what is true? Or what do you mean?’ What would you say to him in reply?”

“Well, well,” said he, “so this is like that question of mine!”

“There is no reason why not,” said I, “but even if it is not like that but it seems like that to the person you are questioning, do you not think he is likely nonetheless to answer based on how it appears to him, whether we are prohibiting these responses or whether we are not?”

“Is that what you are going to do now?” he said. “Will you give one of those answers that I prohibited?”

“I would not be surprised,” said I, “if that is how it seemed to me once I had considered the matter.”

“And what if I should present a different answer about justice besides these, and better than all of them? What fate would you deserve?”

“The fate that is appropriate to someone who does not know,” said I. “There is no alternative. And presumably it is appropriate that he learn from someone who knows. So this is the fate I deserve to suffer.”

“How sweet you are,” said he. “But as well as learning, you should also pay a fee.”

“Yes, when I have the money,” said I.

“You have it,” said Glaucon. “If money is an issue speak on, Thrasymachus, since we will all pay for Socrates.”

“Yes, I am quite sure you will,” said he, “so that Socrates may arrange things, as usual. He does not answer questions himself, and when someone else answers, he may take hold of an argument and refute it.”

“Best of men,” said I, “how could someone give answers when, in the first place, he does not know nor does he claim to know? And secondly, even if he does have some thoughts on the matter, he is prohibited from saying what he believes by a man of no mean status? No, it is more reasonable that you speak, since you actually claim to know and to be able to express what you know. So you really must do this. Gratify me by answering the question. Do not hold back, and instruct Glaucon here, and the others too.”

Once I had said all this, Glaucon and the others implored him to do what I had asked him to do, and Thrasymachus was obviously eager to speak in order to impress people, since he thought he had a really good answer, but he pretended to be keen that I be the one to answer the question. He finally gave his assent, and then he said, “There is the wisdom of Socrates. Although he himself does not want to teach, he goes about learning from others, and he does not even thank them.”

“What you are saying is true, Thrasymachus,” said I, “I do learn from others. But when you say I do not give thanks, that is not true, for I give as much as I am able to give. But since I do not have money, I am only able to give praise, and once you give your answer you will know full well, there and then, just how eagerly I praise someone who seems to me to speak well, since I believe you will speak well.”

“Then listen,” said he. “Indeed, I maintain that what is just is nothing else but the ‘advantage of the stronger’. Well, why do you not praise me? You just do not want to.”

“I should understand what you are saying first,” said I. “At the moment I still do not know what you mean. You maintain that the advantage of the stronger is just. But what exactly do you mean by this, Thrasymachus? For presumably you are not maintaining that if Polydamas, the pancratiast,¹⁷ is stronger than we are, and it is to his advantage to eat beef for his body, then this food is also advantageous for us weaker folk, and just too?”

“You are loathsome indeed, Socrates,” said he, “and you are interpreting the argument in a sense that does it the most damage.”

“Not at all, best of men,” said I. “Just explain what you mean, with greater clarity.”

“Do you not know,” said he, “that some cities are governed as tyrannies, some as democracies, others as aristocracies?”

“Of course.”

“And whatever rules in each city exercises power?”

“Entirely so.”

“And each ruling group institutes the laws to its own advantage, democratic laws in the case of a democracy, tyrannical laws in the case of a tyranny, and so on. Having instituted them, they then proclaim that this, what is advantageous to themselves, is just for those over whom they rule and so they punish those who go against this, as lawbreakers who are acting unjustly. So this, best of men, is what I say is just: it is the same in all cities, the advantage of the established ruling group. This presumably holds power, and it follows, if one reasons correctly, that what is just is the same everywhere: the advantage of the stronger.”

“I now understand what you are saying,” said I, “and I shall attempt to understand whether it is true or not. So, Thrasymachus, you too have answered that what is advantageous is what is just, even though you prohibited me from giving this answer, and yet the words ‘for the stronger’ were added on to it.”

“Yes, a minor addition perhaps,” said he.

“It is not yet clear whether it is significant or minor, but it is clear that we should consider whether or not you are speaking the truth. Now, since I too accept that what is just is something advantageous, but you make an addition and say it is the advantage of the stronger, while I do not know, consider it we must.”

“Consider it then,” said he.

“That is what I shall do,” said I. “Tell me then. Do you not maintain that it is just to obey those who rule?”

“Yes, I do.”

“And are the rulers of each city unerring, or are they also capable of making some mistakes?”

“Absolutely,” said he. “They are also quite capable of making some mistakes.”

“So as they set about instituting the laws, would they not institute some laws correctly, others incorrectly?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“And what is instituted correctly is to their own advantage, and what is instituted incorrectly is to their disadvantage. Is this what you are saying?”

“Just so.”

“But whatever they institute must be enacted by those over whom they rule, and this is what is just?”

“Of course.”

“Then according to your argument, it is just not only to enact what is advantageous for the stronger, but also the opposite, what is disadvantageous.”

“What are you saying?” he replied.

“What you are saying, I think, but let us take a better look. Hasn’t it been agreed that when the rulers are directing their subjects to enact something, they sometimes make mistakes about what is best for themselves, yet it is just for the subjects to enact whatever the rulers order? Has this not been agreed?”

“Yes, I think so,” said he.

¹⁷ Pancration was a sport that combined boxing and wrestling.

339 e “Then, you must suppose,” I said, “that you also accept that it is just to do what is disadvantageous to those who rule and are stronger, whenever the rulers unintentionally direct what is bad for themselves, since you maintain that it is just for the others to enact what the rulers have directed. So in that case, wisest Thrasymachus, does it not necessarily follow that it is just to do the very opposite of what you are saying? For the weaker have surely been directed to enact what is disadvantageous to the stronger.”

340 a “Yes, by Zeus, Socrates,” said Polemarchus, “nothing could be clearer.”

“Yes, if you are to be his witness,” said Clitophon, interrupting.

“Why is there a need of a witness?” said he. “Indeed, Thrasymachus himself accepts that although the rulers sometimes direct what is bad for themselves, it is still just for the others to enact this.”

“Because, Polemarchus, Thrasymachus posited that to enact the orders of the rulers is just.”

340 b “Yes, Clitophon, and he also proposed that the advantage of the stronger is just. And having put both these proposals forward, he went on to admit that the stronger sometimes order the weaker folk, their subjects, to enact what is disadvantageous for themselves. But based upon these admissions, what is advantageous for the stronger would be no more just than what is not advantageous.”

“But,” said Clitophon, “by ‘what is advantageous for the stronger’ he meant what the stronger person believes to be advantageous to himself. This is what is to be enacted by the weaker, and he posited that this is what is just.”

“But that is not what he said,” said Polemarchus.

340 c “That makes no difference, Polemarchus,” said I. “Rather, if Thrasymachus now means it in this way, let us accept it from him in this way.

“So tell me, Thrasymachus, is this what you wanted to say is just, what seems to the stronger to be to the advantage of the stronger, whether it is advantageous or not? Shall we say that this is what you mean?”

“No, not in the least,” said he. “Do you think that I call someone who is making mistakes stronger, at the time he is making the mistakes?”

340 d “Yes,” said I, “I did think you meant this when you accepted that those who rule are not unerring, but also make some mistakes.”

“That is because,” said he, “you are conducting your arguments unfairly, Socrates. Take an immediate example. Do you call someone who is making mistakes in treating the sick a physician, based on the actual mistake he is making, or someone who makes mistakes in calculating, a calculator at the time he is making a mistake, based on this mistake? No, I think this is just our manner of speaking. We say the physician makes mistakes, the calculator makes mistakes, and so does the writing teacher. But in fact, I think each of these, insofar as they are what we call them, never makes mistakes. And so, according to this precise account, since you do speak so precisely, none of these practitioners errs. Someone who makes mistakes does so in the absence of knowledge when he is not a practitioner, and so no practitioner, wise person, or ruler, makes mistakes at that time when he is a ruler, even though everyone would say that the physician erred, and so did the ruler. So it is in this sense in which you should understand the answer I gave you a moment ago. But the other account is the most precise. The one who rules, insofar as he is a ruler, does not make mistakes and he unerringly institutes what is best for himself, and this must be enacted by the one who is ruled. And so, as I have been saying from the outset, I say that what is just is enacting what is to the advantage of the stronger.”

341 a

“Very well, Thrasymachus,” said I. “do you think I am arguing unfairly?”

“Yes, certainly,” he replied.

“Because you think I asked my questions in the way I asked them, as part of a plan to do damage to you in the arguments.”

“I actually know this quite well,” he said. “Yes, and you will not get any further for you could not do this damage without my noticing it, nor will you be capable of overpowering me in the argument now that you have been found out.” 341 b

“Blessed man,” said I, “I would not even make the attempt! But to avoid something of this sort happening to us all over again, please clarify in which sense you mean ‘the ruler’ and ‘the stronger’. Do you mean the ruler and stronger in the common sense of the words or in the precise sense that you explained just now, who is stronger and whose advantage it will be just for the weaker person to enact?”

“The one who is a ruler in the most precise sense of the word.” said he. “So do damage to that and be unfair if you can – I am asking you for no concessions – but you won’t be able to.” 341 c

“Do you think,” said I, “that I would be so insane as to attempt to shave the lion, by being unfair to Thrasymachus?”

“Well, you made the attempt just now,” said he, “and you came to naught in that case too.”

“Enough of this sort of thing,” said I. “But tell me. The physician, in the precise sense you explained earlier, is he a money-maker or someone who treats the sick? And you should speak of someone who really is a physician.”

“He is someone who treats the sick,” he replied.

“What about a steersman? Is someone who is a steersman, in the correct sense, a sailor or someone who is in charge of sailors?”

“Someone who is in charge of sailors.” 341 d

“We need not, I believe, take account of the fact that he sails in a ship, nor is he to be called a sailor for that reason. For he is not called a steersman based on his sailing, but based on his skill and the fact that he is in charge of the sailors.”

“True,” he said.

“Is there not some advantage that belongs to each of these?”

“Absolutely.”

“And is not the skill naturally directed to this,” I asked, “to seeking out and furnishing what is advantageous to each?”

“It is directed to this,” said he.

“Now, in each of the skills too, is there any other advantage apart from being as perfect as possible?”

“In what sense are you asking this question?” 341 e

“It is as if you were to ask me,” said I, “whether it is sufficient that our body be a body, or is it in need of something else besides. I would reply that it does need something else, entirely so, and that is why the skill of medicine has now been invented, because our body is deficient and it is not sufficient that it be like this. So this skill has been provided in order to furnish what is advantageous to this body. Do you think,” said I, “that I would have answered correctly or incorrectly had I said this?”

“Correctly,” he replied. 342 a

“What about this? Is medicine itself deficient, or is there any other skill that needs some additional excellence, in the way that eyes need sight and ears need hearing, and is there, for this reason, a need for some skill, set over them, that considers what’s advantageous in this respect, and provides it? So too, is there any deficiency in the skill itself, and does each skill need another skill that will consider what’s advantageous to it, and does the one that’s considering this need another skill of this sort, in turn, and is this an unending process? Or will the skill consider what is advantageous to itself? Or does it need neither itself nor another skill to consider what is advantageous in relation 342 b

to its own deficiency, because there is no deficiency or error present in any skill, nor is it the function of a skill to seek what is advantageous for anything apart from the object of that skill? And is it unblemished and pure, because it is right, as long as each skill is precisely and wholly what it is? And considering that ‘precise’ formulation, is this how matters stand or not?”

“So it appears,” he said.

342 c “So,” said I, “medicine does not consider what is advantageous to medicine, but to the body.”

“Yes,” said he.

“Nor does horsemanship consider what is advantageous to horsemanship, but to horses. Nor does any other skill consider what is advantageous to itself, since it has no additional need. It considers what is advantageous to the object of that skill.”

“It appears so,” he replied.

“But of course, Thrasymachus, the skills rule over and dominate the objects of those skills.”

He agreed to this, but with great reluctance.

342 d “So no knowledge at all considers or commands what is to the advantage of the stronger, but what is to the advantage of the weaker, and of whatever is ruled by the knowledge itself.”

In the end he accepted this too, although he did attempt to resist it. Once he had agreed, I said, “So is it not the case that no physician, insofar as he is a physician, considers or commands what is advantageous to the physician rather than to the sick person? For it has been agreed that the physician, in the precise sense, is someone who rules over bodies, but is not a money-maker. Was that not agreed?”

He concurred.

“Is not the steersman too, in the precise sense, also someone who rules over sailors, but is not a sailor?”

342 e He agreed.

“So a steersman and ruler of this sort will not consider and command what is advantageous to the steersman, but to the sailor, the person whom he rules over.”

He concurred, reluctantly.

“In that case, Thrasymachus,” said I, “no one at all exercising any rulership, insofar as he is a ruler, considers or commands what is advantageous to himself, but to the one he rules over, for the sake of whom he himself exercises his skill. With his gaze fixed upon that, and whatever is advantageous and appropriate to that, he says all that he says and he does all that he does.”

343 a Now, once we had reached this stage in the discussion, and it was apparent to everyone that his argument about what is just had undergone a complete reversal, Thrasymachus, instead of responding said, “Tell me, Socrates, do you have a nurse?”

“Why is this?” said I. “Should you not respond rather than asking a question like this?”

“Because,” said he, “she overlooks your snivelling and does not wipe your nose though you need it. In any case, with her, you do not even distinguish between shepherds and sheep.”

“Why exactly are you saying this?” I asked.

343 b “Because you think the shepherds and the neatherds consider the good of the sheep and the oxen, and fatten them and care for them with a view to something else besides the good of their masters and themselves. What is more, you imagine that those who rule our cities, those who truly rule, have some other attitude towards those they rule over than the disposition someone might have towards sheep, and that they consider something else, night and day, besides how they will benefit themselves. And when it comes to what is just and justice, what is unjust and injustice, you are so remote that you are unaware that justice and what is just are, in fact, someone else’s good, being the advantage of the stronger, of those who rule, and the personal detriment of whoever obeys and is subordinate. But injustice is the opposite, and it rules over the truly simple-minded

343 c

folk who are just and who, because they are ruled, do what is to the advantage of that stronger man and make that person happy by serving him, without making themselves happy at all. 343 d

“But, my utterly simple-minded Socrates, you should consider the fact that everywhere the just man has less than the unjust man. Firstly, in contractual arrangements with one another, wherever people like this are in partnership with one another, you would never find that the just man has more than the unjust man when the partnership is ended. No, he has less. Again, in their dealings with the city, when there are taxes to be paid, the just man pays more and the unjust man pays less although they are equally liable. And when there is money to be had one gains nothing while the other gains a lot. And, indeed, whenever either of them holds a position of authority, the just man, even if he suffers no other loss, suffers the deterioration of his personal affairs through neglect, and because he is just he takes no personal advantage of public property. And besides all this he is hated by his family and acquaintances when he is not prepared to afford them any service beyond what is just. But what happens to the unjust man is the opposite of all this. Indeed, I am referring to the person I was speaking of just now, someone who is capable of getting more, on a large scale. That is the person you should consider if you really want to judge how much more advantageous it is to him, personally, to be unjust rather than just. 343 e

“But the easiest way of all for you to understand this is by taking the most extreme injustice, that makes the one who has committed the injustice as happy as he can possibly be, and those who have suffered the injustice, and are not prepared to act unjustly, utterly wretched. This is tyranny, which takes, not little by little but all at once by stealth and by force, what does not belong to it, what is sacred and holy, private and public. If someone acts unjustly by enacting a particular part of this extreme injustice, and he is found out, he is penalised and attracts enormous reproach. And, indeed, temple robbers, kidnappers, house-breakers, swindlers and thieves is what they call people who, through crimes of this sort, are unjust in part only. But, when in addition to stealing the wealth of the citizens someone actually kidnaps and enslaves the citizens themselves, instead of these shameful names he is called happy and blessed, not only by those citizens, but by anyone who hears that he has acted in this completely unjust manner. For, those who reproach injustice do not reproach it because they are afraid of doing unjust deeds. No, they are afraid of suffering them. 344 a

“And so, Socrates, injustice on a sufficiently large scale is stronger, freer and more dominant than justice. And as I said at the outset, what is just is indeed the advantage of the stronger, and what is unjust is profitable and advantageous to oneself.” 344 b

Having said all this, Thrasymachus intended to leave, having poured his speech about our ears in a massive flood, like an attendant at the baths. However, the company wouldn’t allow him to do so. Rather, they compelled him to stay and provide an argument in support of what he had said. I myself was particularly insistent, and I said, 344 d

“Heavens, Thrasymachus, after firing off a speech like that, do you intend to take your leave before you provide adequate instruction or before you have learned whether or not this is how matters stand? Or do you think we are trying to determine some minor issue, rather than a course of life which would enable anyone who pursues it to live the most profitable of lives?” 344 e

“Indeed,” said Thrasymachus, “do I think this is not the case?”

“You seem to think so,” said I, “or else you do not care about us, nor have you any concern about whether we live worse or better lives, we who are in ignorance about what you claim to know. So, good man, take heart and explain it to us, since you won’t fare at all badly if you do a good deed for so many of us. In fact, I must say that I, for my part, am not persuaded, nor do I believe that injustice is more profitable than justice, not even if someone allows it free rein and does not prevent it from doing whatever it wishes. No, my good man, let a man be unjust and able to act unjustly, 345 a

345 b either by avoiding detection or by open force. Nevertheless, he does not persuade me that injustice is more profitable than justice. Now, there is probably someone else among us, and I am not alone, who is not convinced of this, so do enough to persuade us, blessed man, that we are being ill-advised when we set justice above injustice.”

“But how am I going to persuade you?” he asked. “Indeed, if you are not persuaded by what I said just now, what more can I do for you, besides taking the argument and shoving it into your soul?”

345 c “By Zeus,” said I, “do not do that. No, firstly, you should stand by whatever you said, or if you do change your position do so openly and do not try to deceive us. But at the moment, Thrasymachus, let us look again at the previous examples, because, you see, although you began by defining the physician in the true sense, you no longer thought it necessary later on to be careful and precise about the shepherd in the true sense. Instead, you presume that he fattens the sheep with a view not to what’s best for the sheep, but with a view to a banquet, as if he were a dinner guest about to have a feast, or again with a view to selling them, like a businessman rather than a shepherd. But the skill of shepherding surely does not care for anything else apart from what it has been put in charge of, and how to provide to this what’s best, since as long as it does not fall short of being shepherding, whatever belongs to itself has, of course, already been provided to a sufficient extent so that it can be best. Accordingly, I think we need to accept at this stage that all rule, insofar as it is rule, does not consider what’s best for anything else except what it rules over and tends upon, whether the rule is exercised in civic or in private matters. But do you think that those who exercise rule in our cities, those who rule in the true sense, do so of their own free will?”

345 e “By Zeus,” said he, “I do not think it. I know it very well.”

346 a “But why, Thrasymachus?” said I. “Are you not aware that in the case of the other rulers, no one is prepared of his own free will to exercise rule? Rather, they ask for payment because any benefit accruing from the exercise of rule will accrue, not to themselves, but to those who are ruled. Now, tell me this much. Do we not consistently say that each of the skills is different in virtue of having a different power? And, blessed man, do not give an answer that is contrary to your own opinion, so that we may make some progress.”

“Yes,” said he, “they are different in virtue of this.”

“Does not each of them provide some benefit of its own to us, a benefit that is not common to them all, medicine providing health, steersmanship providing safety at sea, and so on for the other skills?”

“Entirely so.”

346 b “And does not wage-earning provide a reward, since that is its power? Or do you call medicine and steersmanship the same skill? Or, if you really want to make a precise distinction, as you proposed, would you be any more inclined to refer to a steersman’s skill as medicine if someone acting as a steersman were to become healthy because of the advantages of a sea voyage?”

“Of course not,” he said.

“Nor, I believe, would you say this about wage-earning if someone earning wages were to become healthy.”

“Of course not.”

“What about this? Would you call medicine wage-earning if someone were to earn a wage whilst healing people?”

346 c “I would not,” he said.

“Well, did we not agree that the benefit of each skill is particular to that skill?”

“I grant that,” said he.

“Then whatever benefit all the practitioners obtain in common, they obviously obtain by their common recourse to something else that is the same.”

“So it seems,” said he.

“And yet, we maintain that the benefit whereby the practitioners gain a reward comes to them from their recourse to the wage-earning skill.”

He agreed reluctantly.

“So, it is not from his own skill that each practitioner has this benefit, whereby he obtains a reward. 346 d
Rather, if we are to consider this precisely, medicine produces health while wage-earning produces a reward, and although house-building produces a house, wage-earning follows it and produces a reward. And the same goes for all the other skills. Each performs its own function and benefits whatever it is set over, but if a reward were not to accompany the skill, is there any benefit to the practitioner?”

“Apparently not,” said he.

“In that case, when he works for nothing, does he not confer any benefit then?” 346 e

“No, I think he does.”

“Therefore, Thrasymachus, this much is obvious by now. No skill or rule furnishes what is beneficial to itself but, as we have been saying for some time, it furnishes and commands what is beneficial to whatever it rules over by considering what is to the advantage of the weaker, but not of the stronger. And that is why, dear Thrasymachus, I was saying just now that no one is prepared to exercise rule, and get involved in correcting the evil ways of others, of his own free will. Instead he asks for a reward, because whoever is to enact anything properly by means of a skill never enacts what is best for himself, nor commands it either, when his commands are based upon the skill. Rather, he enacts what’s best for whoever is ruled. These are the reasons, it seems, why there needs to be a reward for those who are going to consent to exercise rule, either money, honour, or a penalty if they will not exercise rule.” 347 a

“What do you mean by this, Socrates?” said Glaucon. “The first two rewards I recognise, but I do not understand what penalty you are referring to, or how you include it among the rewards.”

“Then,” said I, “you do not understand the reward of the best people, on account of which 347 b
the most suitable people exercise rule, whenever they are willing to do so. Or do you not know that having a thirst for honour or for money is said to be, and is indeed, a reproach?”

“I do,” said he.

“Well,” said I, “that is why the good people are not willing to rule, either for the sake of money or honour. For they do not wish to be called hirelings for openly securing a reward from exercising authority, nor to be called thieves for profiting from their position of authority by stealth. Then again, they won’t do it for the sake of honour either for they are not thirsty for honour. So in their case, there also needs to be some necessity or a penalty if they are going to want to exercise rule. 347 c
And that is surely why it is regarded as a disgrace to seek to exercise rule of one’s own free will and not wait for necessity. But if one is not willing to exercise rule oneself, the greatest penalty is to be ruled over by someone of lesser rate. And for fear of this penalty, it appears to me, the reasonable people exercise rule, whenever they do so. And then they set about exercising their authority, not as though they are embarking upon something good, nor as though they are going to do well out of it, but as a necessity, because they are not able to entrust it to anyone better than or like themselves. 347 d

“It is quite likely then that if there were a city constituted entirely of good men, there would be as much contention over not ruling as there is over exercising rule nowadays. And in that case it would become quite evident that, in fact, the true ruler does not, by nature, consider his own advantage, but the advantage of whoever is ruled. Accordingly, everyone who realises this would choose to be benefited by someone else rather than have the trouble of benefiting someone else.

“So I do not agree with Thrasymachus at all, that what is just is the advantage of the stronger. 347 e
Now, we shall consider this again on another occasion, but what Thrasymachus is now saying seems much more significant to me, when he maintains that the life of the unjust person is superior

to the life of the just. Well, Glaucon,” said I, “which do you choose, and which formulation seems truer to you?”

“Well, I say the life of the just person is more profitable.”

348 a “And did you hear how much good Thrasymachus ascribed a moment ago to the life of the unjust?”

“I heard,” said he, “but I am not convinced.”

“So do you want us to persuade him that he is not speaking the truth, if we can somehow find a way to do so?”

“How could I not want that?” said he.

348 b “Well, if we argue against him, setting one speech against another, as to how much good there is in turn in being just, and he makes a reply, and we make another speech, it will be necessary to count up the good points and measure how many of them each of us made. And at that stage we shall need some judges to decide on the issue. But if we consider the matter as we did just now, by coming to agreement with one another, we ourselves shall be both judges and pleaders at the same time.”

“Yes, certainly,” said he.

“So which approach do you like best?” I asked.

“This one,” Glaucon replied.

“Come on then, Thrasymachus,” said I, “answer us, from the beginning. Do you maintain that complete injustice is more profitable than justice, when it too is complete?”

348 c “I certainly do maintain this,” said he, “and I have explained the reasons why.”

“Well then, tell me what you say about them in this respect. I presume you refer to one of them as an excellence and the other as a vice?”

“Of course.”

“Justice being an excellence, and injustice a vice?”

“Well, that is likely, my sweet friend, since I also say that injustice is profitable, while justice is not.”

“What are you saying then?”

“The opposite,” said he.

“That justice is a vice?”

“No, it is a very noble simple-mindedness.”

348 d “In that case, is injustice an evil disposition?”

“No, it is sound judgement,” he said.

“And do the unjust people also seem to you, Thrasymachus, to be intelligent and good?”

“Yes, those who are able to be completely unjust at any rate,” said he, “and have the ability to bring cities and entire races of humans under their power. But perhaps you think I am speaking of pickpockets,” said he, “although this sort of thing is profitable too, as long as it goes undetected. Yet it is not worth mentioning compared to what I have just been speaking of.”

348 e “I am not unaware,” said I, “of the point you wish to make, but what surprised me was this: you placed injustice alongside excellence and wisdom, although you placed justice with their opposites.”

“That is where I place them, very much so.”

“This is now a tougher challenge, my friend, and it is no longer easy to come up with a response. For if you had proposed that injustice is profitable, and yet accepted that it is an evil and a disgrace, as some others do, we would have something to say by discussing it in conventional terms.

349 a But you are obviously going to say that it is noble and strong, and you will attribute to it all the other qualities that we used to attribute to justice since you have even dared to place it alongside excellence and wisdom.”

“Your prophecy could not be truer,” said he.

“And yet,” said I, “I should not hold back from developing the argument, as long as I understand you to be saying what you are actually thinking. Indeed, Thrasymachus, I do not think you are joking at the moment. No, you are expressing your opinions as to what is true.”

“What difference does it make to you,” said he, “whether this is my opinion or not? Why do you not just refute the argument?”

“No reason,” said I. “But apart from all this, please try to answer one further question. Do you think the just person would want to get more than another just person, in any respect?” 349 b

“Not at all,” said he. “Otherwise he would not be the charming, simple-minded fellow he actually is.”

“And what of the just action?”

“No, not that either,” he said.

“And would he think he deserves to get more than the unjust person, and would he believe that this is just or would he not believe so?”

“He would believe it,” said he, “and he would think he deserved it, but he would be unable to achieve it.”

“But I am not asking you that,” said I, “but whether the just man wants, and thinks he deserves, to get more than the unjust man, but not more than the just man.” 349 c

“Yes, that is it,” said he.

“And what about the unjust man? Does he think he deserves to get more than the just man and more than the just action?”

“How could he do otherwise,” he said, “when he thinks he deserves to get more than everyone?”

“Will not the unjust also get more than the unjust person and the unjust action, and will he not strive, in all things, to get more for himself?”

“That is it.”

“Should we, in fact, put it like this?” I asked. “The just man does not get more than someone like himself, only someone unlike, while the unjust gets more than his like and his unlike.” 349 d

“An excellent formulation,” he said.

“And yet the unjust person is intelligent and good,” said I, “while the just person is neither?”

“That too is a good way of putting it,” said he.

“In that case,” said I, “does not the unjust man resemble the intelligent and the good, while the just man does not?”

“Yes, indeed,” said he. “How could this sort of person fail to resemble people like this, and how could the other fellow resemble them?”

“Well said. So each of them is this sort of person. They are each the sort of people they resemble.”

“What else could they be?” he said.

“Very well, Thrasymachus. And do you say that one person is musical and another is unmusical?” 349 e

“I do.”

“Which of them is intelligent and which is unintelligent?”

“The musical person is presumably intelligent, and the unmusical person unintelligent.”

“Is he not good in matters wherein he is intelligent, and bad in matters wherein he is unintelligent?”

“Yes.”

“What about the medical man? Is not the situation the same?”

“It is.”

“So, best of men, would it seem to you that any musical man, when tuning his lyre, would want to get more than another musical man in tightening and loosening the strings, or would you think he deserves to get more?”

“No, I do not think so.”

“Would he want to get more than the unmusical man?”

“Necessarily,” he replied.

350 a “And what about the medical man? In prescribing food and drink, do you think he would want to get more than the medical man, or the medical procedure?”

“Of course not.”

“But more than someone who is not a medical man?”

“Yes.”

“Well then, in the case of all knowledge and ignorance, consider this. Would anyone at all who is knowledgeable want to choose to do, or say, more than another knowledgeable person, rather than choosing the same as someone who is like himself, in the case of the same activity?”

“Yes,” said he. “Perhaps that is how matters must stand in this case.”

350 b “What about someone who is not knowledgeable? Would he not want to get more than both the knowledgeable person and the person who is not knowledgeable, in like manner?”

“Probably.”

“And whoever is knowledgeable is wise?”

“I agree.”

“And whoever is wise is good?”

“I agree.”

“So, whoever is good and wise does not want to get more than his like, although he does want to get more than his unlike, and his opposite.”

“So it seems,” said he.

“But whoever is bad and ignorant wants to get more than his like, and more than his opposite too.”

“Apparently.”

“In that case, Thrasymachus, does not our unjust man get more than his like and his unlike? Were you not saying this?”

“I was,” said he.

350 c “And yet, whoever is just will not get more than his like, but he will get more than his unlike?”

“Yes.”

“So the just person,” said I, “resembles the wise and the good, while the unjust resembles the bad and the ignorant.”

“Quite likely.”

“But surely we agreed that whoever someone is like, that is the sort of person he actually is.”

“We agreed indeed.”

“So the just person has turned out, for us, to be good and wise, and the unjust person ignorant and bad.”

350 d Now, Thrasymachus did agree with all this, but not as easily as I am now describing. Rather he was dragged reluctantly, perspiring prodigiously as you would expect on a summer’s day. Then I saw what I had never seen before, Thrasymachus blushing. And since we had finally agreed that justice is excellence and wisdom, while injustice is badness and ignorance, I said, “There it is, let that be our position on this. And yet we also maintained that injustice is strong, or do you not remember, Thrasymachus?”

350 e “I remember,” said he, “but what you are now saying is unsatisfactory to me, and I have something to say about this. Yet if I were to say it, I know quite well that you’d accuse me of making public speeches. So, either allow me to speak as much as I want to, or if you want to ask questions ask, and I shall respond with ‘there it is’, as we do to old women telling stories, and nod my head and shake my head.”

“No, no,” said I, “not if it is contrary to your own opinion.”

“Yes, to satisfy you,” he said. “Since you will not allow me to speak, what else do you want me to do?”

“Nothing, by Zeus,” said I. “But if you really are going to do this, do it, and I shall ask my questions.”

“Ask them.”

“Then I ask this question, the one I asked earlier, so that we may consider the argument thoroughly, in due order. What sort of thing is justice in relation to injustice? For it was said, somehow, that injustice is more powerful and stronger than justice, and yet now, if justice is indeed wisdom and excellence,” said I, “I think it will easily be shown to be stronger than injustice, since, in fact, injustice is ignorance. No one could still fail to recognise that. But I have no desire, Thrasymachus, to consider this in such a facile manner, but somewhat as follows. Would you maintain that a city is unjust when it attempts to enslave other cities and reduce them to slavery, and indeed hold many more in subjection, having enslaved them already?”

“Yes, of course. And the best city, being utterly unjust, will do this to the greatest extent.”

“I understand,” said I, “that this was your argument, but I am considering the following question: whether a city that becomes stronger than another city will have this power, in the absence of justice, or is it necessary for it that justice be present?”

“Well, if it is as you were just saying, and justice is wisdom, then this will happen when justice is present. But if it is as I was saying, then this will happen when injustice is present.”

“Thrasymachus, I am really delighted,” said I, “that you are not only nodding and shaking your head, but also responding so beautifully.”

“Yes,” said he, “I am being obliging towards you.”

“It is nice of you to do so, but please oblige me a little more and tell me this. Do you think a city or an army, robbers or thieves, or any other group that jointly undertakes something in an unjust manner, would be able to accomplish anything if they were unjust towards one another?”

“Of course not,” said he.

“But what if they were not unjust to one another? Wouldn’t they be more likely to accomplish something?”

“Very much so.”

“Because injustice, Thrasymachus, presumably causes factions, hatred, and conflict among them, while justice brings like-mindedness and friendship. Is this so?”

“Let it be so,” said he, “so that I do not have to differ with you.”

“Again, that is good of you, best of men. But tell me this. If the function of injustice is to produce hatred wherever it is present, will it not also, whether it arises among free men or slaves, make them hate one another and develop factions, and be unable to act with one another jointly?”

“Entirely so.”

“And what if it arises among two people? Will they not differ, develop hatred, and become enemies of each other and of the just people?”

“They will,” said he.

“And if injustice arises in a single person, my surprising friend, will it lose its own power or will it still retain it nonetheless?”

“Let us say it retains it nonetheless.”

“Is it not apparent that the sort of power it has is as follows. Wherever it arises, be it in a city, a family, an army, or anything else at all, injustice first renders it incapable of acting in collaboration with itself because of faction and difference, and what’s more it makes it an enemy of itself, and of everything that is opposite to it, and of the just? Is this not the case?”

“Entirely so.”

“And if it is present even in a single person, it will I presume produce those same outcomes, the outcomes it naturally produces. Firstly, injustice will render him incapable of action because he has inner factions and is not like-minded with himself, and also make him an enemy of himself, and of the just. Is this so?”

“Yes.”

“And surely, my friend, the gods too are just?”

352 b “So be it,” said he.

“And in that case the unjust man will be an enemy of the gods, Thrasymachus, and the just man a friend.”

“Feast away on your argument,” said he. “Have no fear. I shall not oppose you in case I incur the displeasure of these people here.”

“Come on, then,” said I, “and complete what is left of the banquet for me by answering questions as you have just been doing. For the just are apparently wiser, better and more capable of action, while the unjust are not able to do anything together. And in fact, when we say that despite being unjust, people have on occasion accomplished something by working together jointly, with strength, we are not speaking the entire truth. For had they been perfectly unjust, they could not have restrained their injustice towards one another, so it is clear that some justice was present in them which prevented them from being unjust both to one another and the people they were set against at the same time. Because of this justice, they accomplished what they accomplished, and they embarked upon their unjust exploits only half-corrupted by injustice, since total degenerates, who are completely unjust, are also completely incapable of accomplishing anything.”

352 d

“Now, as I understand it, this is how matters stand, and not as you proposed at first. However, we should also consider the issue we put forward for consideration after that, whether the just people live better lives than the unjust and are happier. Well, based on what we have said, in my opinion it now appears that they are happier. Nevertheless, we should consider this more thoroughly, for this argument is not concerned with any random issue. It concerns the manner in which our lives should be lived.

“Consider it then,” said he.

“Very well,” said I. “So tell me, do you think a horse has some function?”

352 e “I do.”

“And would you propose that this function of a horse, or of anything else, would be what can only be carried out with that, or is best carried out with that?”

“I do not understand,” said he.

“Well, what about this? Can you see with anything else except your eyes?”

“Of course not.”

“And again, can you hear with anything except your ears?”

“Not at all.”

“Would we not be right to say that these are the functions of those organs?”

“Entirely so.”

353 a “What about this? Could you take a cutting from a vine with a dagger, a chisel, or with many other tools?”

“Of course.”

“But you could not do it, I think, with anything else as well as you could do it with a pruning hook, manufactured for this purpose.”

“True.”

“In that case, should we not propose that this is its function?”

“We should indeed.”

“Well, I think you should now have a better understanding of my line of questioning just now,

when I was asking if the function of something is what it alone can accomplish or what it can accomplish better than anything else.”

“Yes,” said he, “I now understand, and it seems to me that this is the function of anything.” 353 b

“Very well,” said I. “Now, do you also think there is an excellence belonging to anything to which some function has been assigned? But let us go back again to the same examples. Is there some function of eyes, according to us?”

“There is.”

“And in that case, is there also an excellence of eyes?”

“An excellence too.”

“What about ears? Do they have a function?”

“Yes.”

“Have they not an excellence too?”

“An excellence too.”

“And in all other cases, does not the same apply?”

“It does.”

“Hold on. Could the eyes ever perform their own function properly without possessing their own particular excellence, but possessing a defect instead of the excellence?” 353 c

“Well, how could they?” he replied. “For presumably you mean that they possess blindness instead of sight.”

“I am not yet asking what their excellence might be, but whether anything that exercises a function carries out its own function well by means of its own excellence, and badly by means of its defect.”

“Well, what you are saying is true in this case,” said he.

“Will not the ears carry out their own function badly when deprived of their own excellence?”

“Entirely so.”

“So, do we apply the same argument to all the other instances?” 353 d

“Well, I think so.”

“Come on then, next consider the following. Is there some function of the soul that you could not perform by means of anything else there is, for instance, caring, ruling and deliberating, and everything of that sort? Is there anything else besides soul to which we might properly attribute these? Could we maintain that they are not particular to soul?”

“They are particular to nothing else.”

“And again, what about living? Shall we say that it is a function of soul?”

“More than anything,” said he.

“Do we not also say that there is some excellence of a soul?”

“We say so.”

“In that case, will a soul ever carry out its own functions well, Thrasymachus, when deprived of its own particular excellence, or is that impossible?” 353 e

“It is impossible.”

“So, of necessity, a bad soul exercises rule and care badly, and a good soul does all this well.”

“Of necessity.”

“Did we not agree that excellence of soul is justice, and badness is injustice?”

“Yes, we agreed.”

“Then, the just soul, and the just man, will live well, while the unjust man will live badly.”

“So it appears,” said he, “according to your argument.”

“But someone who lives well is blessed and happy, while someone who does not is the opposite.” 354 a

“Of course.”

“In that case, the just person is happy, while the unjust is wretched.”

“Let it be so,” said he.

“But there is no profit in being wretched, but in being happy there is.”

“Of course.”

“Then, blessed Thrasymachus, injustice is never more profitable than justice.”

“Well, Socrates, let this be your feast for the festival of Bendis.”

^{354 b} “A feast provided by you, Thrasymachus,” said I, “once you became gentle with me and stopped being difficult. However, I have not feasted properly, but that’s my own fault, not yours. Rather, I think I am behaving like gluttons, who snatch at whatever is spread before them to get a taste before they have enjoyed the previous dish in due measure. Before considering the first thing we were looking for, the just, and what precisely it is, I let that go and set about considering something about this, whether it is badness and ignorance, or wisdom and excellence. And again later on, when another argument came my way, that injustice is more profitable than justice, I could not restrain myself from going after that and abandoning the other one. So the outcome of the discussion for me, at the moment, is that I know nothing. Since I do not know what precisely the just is, ^{354 c} I shall hardly know whether it happens to be an excellence or not, or whether someone who possesses it is unhappy or happy.”
