PLATO

The Republic

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from understanding (585b). – 586d: Socrates concludes with the claim that each element in the soul can find its proper pleasure if the part that loves wisdom is in control. He calculates the multiple by which the best life is more pleasant than the worst (587a). He offers a final vindication of justice with the help of a comparison between the soul and an imaginary creature of multiple form (588b).

Book 10

595a: Socrates returns to the topic of poetry, last discussed in Books 2 and 3. What is imitation? Socrates answers his question by considering the example of a couch, and distinguishing between the form of the couch, the manufactured couch, and a painting of a couch (596a). He concludes that the products of imitation are far removed from truth (597c). – 598c: Poets, like painters, are imitators. Socrates argues that if they really had the expertise conventionally attributed to them, they would not have been content to remain mere poets (599b). Their knowledge is in fact inferior to a maker’s knowledge, which is in turn inferior to a user’s knowledge (601c). – 602c: Socrates turns from the topic of what imitators know to that of how they affect their audiences. Using a comparison with optical illusions (602c), he argues that imitative poetry aims to stir the irrational element in the soul (603c). Worst of all, it can corrupt even decent people (606c). He concludes that there is no place for such poetry in Callipolis, but only for verses in praise of the gods and of good men (606c). – 608a: Via the claim that imitative poetry prevents the immortal soul from attaining its true reward, Socrates makes the transition to a proof of the soul’s immortality (608d). He insists that the soul cannot be understood in its true nature if we consider only its association with the body, as we have been doing in this discussion (611b). – 612b: Finally, Socrates describes the rewards of justice, as permitted by the rules of their discussion now that justice has first been vindicated without appeal to its reputation or rewards. He briefly reviews the rewards of justice and the penalties for injustice in this life (612d), then narrates an elaborate myth, the myth of Er, describing the rewards and penalties that await us after death (614a). The souls of the dead meet on a meadow to discuss their experiences of reward and punishment (614c); they travel to a place from which they can view the whole cosmos (616b); they choose their next lives (617d); they are reincarnated (620c). Socrates ends the discussion with a farewell (621c).

THE REPUBLIC

Book 1'

337 I went down to the Piraeus yesterday with Glaucos the son of Ariston, to offer a prayer to the goddess.\(^2\) Also I wanted to watch the festival, to see how they would conduct it, since this was the first time it was being celebrated.\(^3\) The parade of Athenians struck me as excellent, and the show put on by the Thracians was every bit as impressive, I thought. We offered our prayers, watched the festival, and then started off on our journey back to town. We were already on our way home when we were spotted by Polemarchus the son of Cephalus. He got his slave to run after us and tell us to wait for him. The slave tagged at my cloak from behind, and said, ‘Polemarchus says you are to wait.’ I turned round, and asked him where his master was.

‘There he is,’ he said, ‘coming along behind you. Wait for him.’

‘We will,’ said Glaucos.

\(^{3}\) In a few moments Polemarchus reached us, with Glaucos’s brother Adeimantus, Nicocles the son of Nicias, and a few others. They had been watching the procession, apparently. And Polemarchus said, ‘It looks as if you’re all on your way back to the city, Socrates. You’re not staying, then?’

\(^1\) It has been traditional since antiquity to divide the Republic into ten “books”. Each book corresponds to a single roll of papyrus, the format in which Plato’s writings were archived, distributed, and read in the ancient world. We do not know whether the division into ten books was made by Plato himself or by a later editor. The numbers and letters in the margin follow the pagination of the sixteenth-century edition of Plato by Stephanus. It is the pagination normally used to circumvent differences of format among subsequent editions and translations.

\(^2\) Bendis, as we are eventually told at the end of Book 1 (354c).

\(^3\) We can date this occasion only to a window of time between 431 and 411 BC.
faded, the greater become one’s desire and taste for conversation. So do not please spend some time with these young men. Do come here and visit us. Regard us as your friends – as your family, even."

‘With pleasure, Cephalus,’ I replied. ‘I love talking to the very old. It’s as if they’re a long way ahead of us on a road which we too are probably going to have to travel. I feel we should learn from them what the road is like – whether it’s steep and rough going, or gentle and easy. In particular, I’d very much like to hear how it strikes you, now that you’ve actually reached the time of life which the poets call “old age, the threshold.” What is your report on it? Would you call it a difficult time of life?’

‘I’ll tell you exactly how it strikes me, Socrates. There’s a group of us who meet fairly often. We’re all about the same age, so we’re following the words of the old proverb: “When we meet, most of them start complaining; they say they miss the things they used to enjoy when they were young, and they recall their sexual exploits, their drinking, their feasting, and everything connected with those pleasures. They get upset, as if they’d suffered some great loss – as if then they had led a wonderful life, whereas now they’re not alive at all. Some of them also complain about the lack of respect shown by their families towards old age, and under this heading they recite a litany of grievances against old age. I think they’re putting the blame in the wrong place, Socrates. If old age were to blame, then not only would I have felt the same way about old age, but so would everyone else who has ever reached this age. And yet I’ve met several people who are not like this – most notably Sophocles the poet. I was there once when someone asked him, “How is your sex life, Sophocles? Are you still capable of making love to a woman?” “Don’t talk about it, my good sir,” was Sophocles’ reply. “It is with the greatest relief that I have escaped it. Like escaping from a fierce and frenzied master.” I thought that a good reply at the time, and I still think it a good one now. Old age is altogether a time of great peace and freedom from that sort of thing.‘

When our appetites fade, and loosen their grip on us, then what happens is exactly what Sophocles was talking about. It is a final release from a bunch of insane masters. Both in this, and in your relations with your family, there is only one thing responsible, and that is not old age, but your character. For those who are civilised and contented, then even

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4 The territory of Athens and its surrounding countryside was subdivided into districts called ‘demes’, each with some degree of self-government.

5 Cephalus’ garland is an item of sacrificial uniform.
old age is only a slight burden. Otherwise — for those who are not like this — both old age and youth prove hard to cope with."

I was very impressed by what he said, and I wanted him to go on talking. So I prompted him further: ‘I suspect most people don’t believe you, Cephalus, when you say that. They think it is not your character which makes old age easy for you, but the fact that you have plenty of money. The rich, they say, have many consolations.’

‘You’re right,’ he said. ‘They don’t believe me. And there’s some truth in what they say. But not as much truth as they think. Themistocles’ famous saying is very much to the point here. A man from Seriphus started making disparaging remarks about him, and telling him that his fame was due not to his own merits, but to those of his city. Themistocles’ reply was that though he himself would never have been famous if he had been born in Seriphus, neither would the other man have been if he had been born in Athens. The same applies to those who are not rich, and who find old age hard to bear. In poverty, even the right temperament will not find old age altogether easy, whereas the wrong temperament, even with the aid of wealth, will never be at peace with itself.’

‘Did you inherit most of the money you possess, Cephalus?’ I asked. ‘Or is most of it money you made yourself, on top of your inheritance?’

‘Did I add to it, Socrates? When it comes to making money, I’m somewhere between my grandfather and my father. My grandfather — my namesake — inherited about as much wealth as I now possess, and increased it many times. My father Lysias reduced it to even less than it is now. I shall be happy if I can leave these boys not less, but a little bit more, than I inherited.’

‘The reason I asked,’ I said, ‘is that you’ve never struck me as being particularly fond of money. And that’s generally the attitude of those who haven’t made it themselves. Compared with most people, self-made men are doubly fond of their money. Those who have made a fortune are devoted to their money in the first place because it is their own creation — just as poets love their poems, or fathers love their children — and in the second place for what they can do with it, just like anyone else. This makes them very poor company, since they can see no value in anything except money.’

‘You’re right,’ he said.

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘But I have another question for you. What would you say is the greatest benefit you have derived from your possession of great wealth?’

‘One which many people might not be inclined to believe, if I told them. But you can take my word for it, Socrates, that when you are confronted by the thought of your own death, you are visited by fear and anxiety about things which never troubled you before. The stories told about what happens in Hades, that anyone who is unjust here will have to pay for it there — stories you once laughed at — begin to trouble your mind. You wonder if they may be true. You start seeing that world for yourself, either through the infirmity of old age, or because you are already in some way closer to it. Suddenly you are full of suspicion and fear; you start calculating and considering whether you’ve done anyone any sort of injustice. And if you find many acts of injustice in your own life, you keep waking in a panic in the middle of the night, the way children do. You live in a state of apprehension. The person with nothing on his conscience, by contrast, has fine and pleasant hopes — a nurse to his old age, as Pindar puts it. He found just the right words for it, Socrates, when he said that anyone who lives his life in righteousness and purity will find that

Sweet hope, old age’s nurse, which chiefly guides
Men’s wayward minds, accompanies his heart
And so protects him.

He’s right — couldn’t be more right. And that’s why I attach the greatest importance to the possession of money. Not for everyone, but for those of good character. If you want to avoid defrauding people, or lying to them, however reluctantly, or going to the world below in a state of terror after failing to pay what you owe — whether sacrifices to a god, or money to a man — then the possession of money contributes in no small measure to this end. Of course it has many other uses as well, but weighing one thing against another I would rate this as one of the most important uses of money, in the eyes of anyone with any sense.’

‘That’s admirably put, Cephalus,’ I said. ‘But since you’ve brought up the subject of justice, can we say, quite simply, that it is truthfulness, and returning anything you may have received from anyone else? Or is it sometimes right to behave in these ways, and sometimes wrong? Let me give you an example. Suppose you borrowed some weapons from a friend when he was in his right mind. Suppose he later went mad, and then asked for them back again. Everyone would agree, I imagine, that you shouldn’t give them back to him, and that anyone who did give them back

\^ The poem from which this quotation comes has been lost.
‘Correct,’ he said.

‘This is not the definition of justice, then – that it is telling the truth, and returning what you have been given.’

‘Yes, it is, Socrates,’ Polemarchus interrupted. ‘At least, it is if we are to believe Simonides.’

‘I’d just like to say,’ Cephalus put in, ‘that this is where I hand the discussion over to you. It’s time I was doing something about the sacrifices.’

‘Well, am I not Polemarchus, your heir?’

‘You certainly are,’ he replied with a laugh, and went off to his sacrifices.

‘Tell me then,’ I said, ‘you who have inherited the argument, what does Simonides say about justice that you think is correct?’

‘That is just to pay everyone what is owed to him.’ That’s what he says, and I think he’s right.’

‘Well,’ I said, ‘Simonides is a wise and inspired man. It is certainly not easy to disagree with him. But what on earth does he mean by this remark? You may well know, Polemarchus. I have no idea. He obviously doesn’t mean what we were talking about just now. If one person gives something to another for safe keeping, and then asks for it back when he is not in his right mind, Simonides doesn’t mean that the other person should give it to him. And yet I imagine the thing which was given for safe keeping is owed to the person who gave it, isn’t it?’

‘Yes.’

‘In that situation – when someone goes out of his mind, and then asks for it back – isn’t returning it completely out of the question?’

‘Yes, it is.’

‘That isn’t what Simonides means, apparently, when he says that it is just to pay back what is owed, or due.’

‘No, it certainly isn’t,’ he said. ‘What he thinks is due to friends is to do them good, not harm.’

‘I understand,’ I replied. ‘If one person gives back to another money which the other has given him for safe keeping, he is not giving what is due if his returning it and the other’s receiving it are harmful, and if the two of them are friends. Isn’t that what you think Simonides means?’

‘Yes, it is.’

‘What about enemies? Should you give them whatever is in fact due to them?’

‘You certainly should,’ he said. ‘And what is due between enemies is what is appropriate – something harmful.’

‘Simonides was speaking as a poet, then, apparently, and disguising his definition of justice. What he meant, it seems, was that justice was giving any individual what was appropriate for him, but he called it “what was owed.”’

‘Yes, that must have been what he meant.’

‘Suppose, then, one of us had said to him: “Simonides, take the art or skill which is called medicine. What does it give that is due and appropriate, and to what does it give it?” What do you think his answer would have been?’

‘Obviously,’ he replied, ‘he would have said it gives the body drugs and food and drink.’

‘And the art of cookery? What does it give that is due and appropriate, and to what does it give it?’

‘It gives flavour to cooked food.’

‘Very well. Then what about the art or skill which we would call justice? What does it give, and to what does it give it?’

‘Well, if we are to follow the previous definitions, Socrates, it gives benefits and injuries to friends and enemies.’

‘Does he mean, then, that helping your friends and harming your enemies is justice?’

‘I think so.’

‘All right. When people are unwell, when it’s a question of sickness and health, who is best at helping them if they are friends and harming them if they are enemies?’

‘A doctor.’

‘And when they’re at sea? Who can best help or harm them amid the dangers of a sea voyage?’

‘A ship’s captain.’

‘What about the just man? In what activity, and for what purpose, is he the one best able to treat his friends well and his enemies badly?’

‘In war and alliances, I think.’

‘Very well. Now, when people aren’t ill, my dear Polemarchus, a doctor is no use to them.’

‘True.’

‘And when they’re not at sea, a ship’s captain is no use to them.’
'No.'
'Does that mean the just man is no use to them when they're not at war?'
'No, I'm sure it doesn't.'
'Justice is something useful even in peacetime, then?'
'Yes, it is.'
'But then so is agriculture, isn't it?'
'Yes.'
'For producing crops.'
'Yes.'
'And shoemaking?'
'Yes, that's useful.'
'For producing shoes, you would say, presumably.'
'Of course.'
'What about justice, then? When you say it's useful in peacetime, what is it useful for? What does it produce?'
'Contracts, Socrates.'
'And by contracts do you mean partnerships, or something else?'
'I mean partnerships.'

'All right. Is the just man a good and useful partner when it comes to making moves in draughts? Or would someone who plays draughts be more use?'
'Someone who plays draughts would be more use.'
'And when it comes to bricklaying, or building in stone, is the just man a more useful and better partner than a builder?'
'Of course not.'
'Well, in what kind of partnership is the just man a better partner than a lyre player, in the way a lyre player is better at playing the notes?'
'In partnerships involving money, I think.'
'Unless by any chance, Polemarchus, it's a question of putting the money to some use — if you have to buy or sell a horse jointly, for a sum of money. In that case, I imagine, someone who knows about horses is more use, isn't he?'
'Apparently.'
'And for buying or selling a ship, you'd want a shipbuilder or ship's captain.'

10 'Draughts' (American 'checkers') is a translation of convenience. The Greek word petteia seems to have applied to several board-games. The group includes but is not limited to strategic games of battle and capture.

'If it looks like it.'
'And a pruning-knife? When you want to keep it safe, then justice is useful, both in public life and in private life. But when you want to use it, then the art of viticulture is what you want?'
'Apparently.'
'And are you going to say the same about a shield or a lyre? That justice is useful when you need to keep them safe and not use them? But that when you do need to use them, then you want the soldier's art and the art of music?'
'I shall have to say that.'
'And in all other examples, justice is useless when it comes to using any of them, and useful only when they are useless?'
'I suppose so.'

'In that case, my friend, justice might not seem to be of any great importance, if its only use is when things are useless. But let's look at a different question. In a fight — a boxing match, possibly, or a fight of some other sort — isn't the person who is cleverest at delivering a blow also the cleverest at guarding against one?'
'He certainly is.'
'And with disease? Is the person who is clever at guarding against it also the cleverest at implanting it secretly?'
'Yes, I think so.'

'And in warfare, the man who is good at guarding a military camp is also good at deception. He can steal the enemies' plans, or defeat their undertakings by stealth.'
'Certainly.'
'So whenever someone is clever at guarding something, he will also be clever at stealing it.'

11 Money deposited with bankers or in temple treasuries did not gain interest.
'That sounds better.'

'In that case, Polemarchus, there are many people for whom it will turn out, if their judgment of people has been mistaken, that it is right to treat their friends badly, since their friends are no good — and their enemies well, since their enemies are good. In those circumstances we shall end up saying the exact opposite of the definition we quoted from Simonides.'

'Yes,' he said. 'It certainly can turn out like that. Let's change our definition. We're probably not defining friend and enemy correctly.'

'How are we defining them, Polemarchus?'

'We said that the person who seemed to be good was a friend.'

'And now? How do you want to change that definition?'

'If someone both seems to be good and is, let's call him a friend. If he seems to be, but isn't really, let's say that he seems to be a friend, but isn't really a friend. And let the same definition apply to an enemy.'

'On this definition, it appears, the good man will be a friend, and the one who is no good will be an enemy.'

'Yes.'

'Do you want us to make an addition to our definition of justice? Our first definition was that it was just to help a friend and harm an enemy. Do you want us now to add to that, and say that it is just to help a friend if he is good, and harm an enemy if he is bad?'

'Yes,' he said. 'I think that would be an excellent definition.'

'But is it really in the nature of a just man, I asked, 'to treat anyone in the world badly?'

'It certainly is,' he said. 'He should treat badly those who are no good — his enemies.'

'If you treat a horse badly, does it become better or worse?'

'Worse.'

'Worse by the standard we use to judge horses, or the standard we use to judge dogs?'

'The standard we use to judge horses.'

'And dogs the same? If you treat them badly, they become worse by the standard we use to judge dogs, not horses?'

'They must do.'

'What about humans, my friend? Are we to say, in the same way, that if they are treated badly they become worse by the standard we use to judge human excellence?'

'Certainly.'

\[12\] Odyssey 10.305–306. Autolycus was a notorious trickster; his name includes the word for 'wolf'. The reference in 'swearing oaths' is to perjury for profit.
'But isn't justice a human excellence?'

'Again, it must be.'

'In which case, my friend, members of the human race who are treated badly must necessarily become more unjust.'

'It looks like it.'

'Are musicians able, by means of music, to make people unmusical?'

'No, that's impossible.'

'Can horsemen make people unskilled with horses by means of horsemanship?'

'No.'

'And can the just make people unjust by means of justice? Or in general, can the good use human excellence to make people bad?'

'No, that's impossible.'

'Yes, because it's the property of heat, I assume, to make things cold. It's the property of its opposite.'

'Yes.'

'Nor is it the property of dryness to make things wet, but of its opposite.'

'Yes.'

'And it is certainly not the property of good to do harm, or treat people badly, but of its opposite.'

'Apparently.'

'And the just man is good?'

'Yes.'

'In that case, Polemarchus, it is not the property of the just man to treat his friend or anyone else badly. It is the property of his opposite, the unjust man.'

'I think you're absolutely right, Socrates,' he said.

'So if anyone says it is just to give everyone what is due to him, and if he means by this that what is due from the just man is harm to his enemies, and help to his friends, then whoever said this was not a wise man. What he said was wrong, since we have clearly seen that it is not just to treat anyone badly under any circumstances.'

'I agree,' he said.

'Shall we take up arms, then, you and I together, if anyone claims that this is what was said by Simonides, or Bias, or Pittacus, or any other of those wise and blessedly happy men?'

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13 1 The Greek could also mean 'isn't justice human excellence?'
make concessions to one another, and not be determined to bring it as clearly as possible into view. Believe us, my friend. The trouble is, we lack the ability. So when you clever people see our efforts, pity is really a far more appropriate reaction than annoyance.

This brought an unpleasant laugh from Thrasy machus. 'Oh my god,' he said. 'I knew it. The irony of Socrates. I predicted it. I told these people you'd refuse to give any answers, that you'd pretend to be modest, that you'd do anything to avoid answering, if anyone asked you a question.'

'Clever of you, Thrasy machus. Clever enough to know what would happen if you were to ask someone what twelve was, but then give him a warning before he answered: 'Now look here, don't go telling us that twelve is twice six, or three times four, or six times two, or four times three. I'm not going to take any nonsense of that sort from you.' It was obvious to you, I imagine, that if you asked the question in that way, no one could possibly answer it. Suppose the person you were asking had objected: 'What do you mean, Thrasy machus? Am I not to give any of the answers you have forbidden? Are you serious? Even if one of them is in fact true? Am I to give you some answer which is not the truth? Or what?' What would your reply have been to his objection?'

'Oh, yes,' he said. 'Such a close analogy!'

'I don't see what's wrong with it,' I said. 'But even if it isn't close, it may still seem to be, to the person being asked. Do you think that will stop him giving the answer he thinks is right, whether we forbid him to or not?'

'Is that just what you're going to do now? Are you going to give one of the answers I told you not to give?'

'It wouldn't surprise me,' I said, 'if on reflection I came to that conclusion.'

'What if I give you an answer about justice which is quite different from all those other answers, a much better answer than those? What do you think should be your penalty?'

'Well, obviously, the penalty appropriate to someone who doesn't know. He should learn, I take it, from the person who does know.'

'You innocent,' said Thrasy machus. 'No, you must do more than learn. You must pay me some money as well.'

'Very well. As soon as I have any, I will.'

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'You do have some,' said Glacon. 'If it's money you're worried about, Thrasy machus, go ahead and speak. We will all pay up for Socrates.'

'I'll bet you will,' he said. 'Anything to allow Socrates to play his usual trick – not answer the question himself, but wait for someone else to answer it, and then take what he says and try to prove it wrong.'

'Really, my dear fellow!' I said. 'How could anyone answer the question if for a start he didn't know the answer – didn't so much as claim to know it – and on top of that, even supposing he did have some idea on the subject, if he'd been told by a man of some authority not to say any of the things he thought? No, it makes much more sense for you to speak. You're the one who claims to know the answer and have something to say. So please, as a favour to me, don't keep your answer to yourself. Give Glacon here and the others the benefit of your knowledge.'

After this appeal, Glacon and the rest begged him to do as I asked. Thrasy machus clearly wanted to speak, to gain credit for the excellent answer he thought he had ready. But he pretended to argue, pretended that he wanted me to be the one to answer. Finally he agreed, saying: 'There's the wisdom of Socrates for you. He refuses to do any teaching himself, just goes around learning from others, without so much as a thank you.'

'That I learn from others, Thrasy machus, is true. But when you say I give them no thanks, you are wrong. I give all the thanks in my power. And what is in my power is merely praise, since I have no money. How enthusiastic I can be, if I approve of what somebody says, you are about to find out, when you give your answer. I'm sure it will be a good one.'

'Hear it, then,' he said. 'I say that justice is simply what is good for the stronger. Well, where's all that praise? You're not going to give it, are you?'

'Yes, I will – as soon as I understand what you mean. At the moment I still don't know. What is good for the stronger, you say, is just. What do you mean by that, Thrasy machus? If Polydamas the all-in wrestler is stronger than us, and eating beef is good for building his body, you presumably don't mean that this food is also good – and right for us who are weaker than him.'

'Socrates, you're beneath contempt. You're taking what I said in the way which makes it easiest to misrepresent my meaning.'

'Not at all, my friend. But you'll have to tell me more clearly what you mean.'

15 'Right' and 'just' both translate the Greek dikaios.
'All right,' he said. 'You must be aware that some cities are tyrannies, some are democracies, and others aristocracies?'

'Of course.'

'And what is in control in each city is the ruling power?'

'Yes.'

'Every ruling power makes laws for its own good. A democracy makes democratic laws, a tyranny tyrannical laws, and so on. In making these laws, they make it clear that what is good for them, the rulers, is what is just for their subjects. If anyone disobeys, they punish him for breaking the law and acting unjustly. That's what I mean, "my friend," when I say that in all cities the same thing is just, namely what is good for the ruling authority. This, I take it, is where the power lies, and the result is, for anyone who looks at it in the right way, that the same thing is just everywhere — what is good for the stronger.'

'Now I understand what you mean,' I said, 'though whether or not it is true remains to be seen. So even your answer, Thrasy7m, is that what is good for a person is just, though that was an answer you told me firmly not to give. But you add the qualification "for the stronger."'

A trivial addition, you may say.'

'That's not yet clear. It may well be an important one. What is clear is that we must examine whether what you say is true. Like you, I agree that justice is something that is good for a person, but while you qualify it as what is good for the stronger, I'm not so sure. We should examine the question.'

'Go on, then. Examine it.'

'I shall,' I said. 'Tell me, don't you also say that it is just for subjects to obey their rulers?'

'I do.'

'And are they infallible, the rulers in all these cities? Or are they capable of making mistakes?'

'They are certainly, I imagine, capable of making mistakes.'

'So when they set about enacting laws, do they enact some correctly, but a certain number incorrectly?'

'In my opinion, yes.'

'And "correctly" is enacting laws which are in their own interest, and "incorrectly" is enacting laws which are against their own interest? Is that what you mean?'

'Yes.'
Thrasymachus is using now, let's take it in that sense. Tell me, Thrasymachus. Was that how you wanted to define justice, as what the stronger thinks is good for him, whether it really is good or not? Is that what we should take you to be saying?

"Certainly not," he said. "Do you imagine I regard a person who makes a mistake, at the moment when he is making the mistake, as stronger?"

"That's certainly what I thought you meant, when you agreed that rulers are not infallible, that they sometimes make mistakes."

"You're always trying to trick people, Socrates, in the way you argue. I mean, if someone makes a mistake in treating the sick, do you call him a doctor by virtue of the actual mistake? Or an accountant who makes a mistake, at the precise moment when he is making his mistake, by virtue of this mistake? No, I think that's just the form of words we use. We say "the doctor made a mistake," "the accountant made a mistake," "the teacher made a mistake." But the reality, I think, is that none of them, to the extent that he is what we call him, ever makes a mistake. In precise language, since you like speaking precisely, no one who exercises a skill ever makes a mistake. People who make mistakes make them because their knowledge fails them, at which point they are not exercising their skill. The result is that no one skilled, no wise man, no ruler, at the moment when he is being a ruler, ever makes a mistake -- though everyone would say "the doctor made a mistake" or "the ruler made a mistake." That's how you must take the answer I gave you just now. But the most precise answer is in fact that the ruler, to the extent that he is a ruler, does not make mistakes; and since he does not make mistakes, he does enact what is best for him, and this is what his subject must carry out. So as I said originally, my definition is that it is just to do what is good for the stronger."

"Very well, Thrasymachus," I said. "So you think I'm a trickster, do you?"

"I certainly do."

"You think I've been asking the questions I have been asking with the deliberate intention of winning the argument unfairly?"

"I'm quite sure of it. It won't do you any good, though. You can't use unfair arguments without my noticing, and once I notice what you are up to, you don't have the resources to defeat me in open argument."

"As if I'd even dream of trying! But since we don't want this situation to arise again, could you make one thing clear? When you say it is right for the weaker to do what is good for the stronger, do you mean the ruler and the stronger in normal usage, or in the precise sense you were talking about just now?"

"I mean the ruler in the most precise sense possible," he said. "There you are. Do your worst. I make no special pleas. Try your tricks if you can. But you won't be able to."

"Do you think I'm crazy? Do you think I want to hear the lion, and start playing tricks on Thrasymachus?"

"You certainly had a try just now, though you weren't much good at that either."

"Well," I said. "Enough of all this. Now tell me. You were talking just now about the doctor in the precise sense. Is he a businessman? Or a healer of the sick? And make sure it's the true doctor you are talking about."

"He's a healer of the sick."

"What about a ship's captain? Is a ship's captain, in the correct sense, a master of sailors or a sailor?"

"A master of sailors."

"It's not an objection, I take it, that he sails in the ship. Nor is he for that reason to be called a sailor, since the title "ship's captain" does not depend on his sailing, but on his art or skill, and his authority over the sailors."

"True," he said.

"And for each of these, is there something which is good for him?"\(^*\)

"Certainly."

"Doesn't the art or skill come into existence for just this reason, to seek out and provide what is good for each person?"

"Yes, it does."

"For each of these skills, then, is there anything else which is good for it, apart from being as perfect as possible?"

"I don't understand your question."

"Suppose you asked me if it was enough for the body to be the body, or whether it needed something else. I would reply: "It certainly does need something else. That's the reason why the art of medicine has come to be invented, because the body is defective, and therefore not self-sufficient. So the art of medicine was developed to provide it with the things which were good for it." Do you think I'd be right in giving that answer, or not?"

"Yes, I think you'd be right."

\(^*\) The reference could be either to the doctor and captain or to the sick and the sailors. So Thrasymachus could understand Socrates' next question as referring to the advantages that the artisan derives from his art.
Socrates, Thrasymachus

The Republic

'What about medicine itself? Is that defective? Does any art or skill, for that matter, stand in need of some virtue or excellence, in the way that eyes need sight and ears need hearing, and sight and hearing require an art or skill to preside over them, an art or skill which will think about and provide what is good for them? Is there any defect in the actual art or skill itself? Does each art or skill need a further art or skill, which will think about what is good for it? And this one which is thinking about it, does it in its turn need another of the same kind, and so on indefinitely, or does it think for itself about what is good for it? Or does no art or skill have any need either of itself or of any other art or skill, for thinking about what is good for it in the light of its own defects? And is this because no art or skill contains any defect or fault, and because it is not appropriate for an art or skill to pursue the good of anything other than that of which it is the art or skill? Isn't any art or skill itself, in the precise sense, without fault or blemish if it is correct -- so long as it is entirely what it is? And when you answer, use words in the precise sense you were talking about. Is it as I have described, or not?'

'It is as you have described,' he said. 'Apparently.'

'In that case,' I said, 'the art of medicine does not think about what is good for the art of medicine, but what is good for the body.'

'Yes.'

'And horsemanship does not think about what is good for horsemanship, but what is good for horses. Nor does any art or skill think about what is good for itself -- it has no need to. No, it thinks about what is good for the thing of which it is the art or skill.'

'Apparently.'

'But surely, Thrasy Machus, arts and skills control, and have power over, the objects of which they are the arts and skills.'

He conceded this, though with great reluctance.

'In which case, there is no branch of knowledge which thinks about, or prescribes, what is good for the stronger, but only what is good for the weaker, for what is under its control.'

He agreed to this too, in the end, though he tried to resist it. And when he did agree, I continued: 'Isn't it a fact that no doctor, to the extent that he is a doctor, thinks about or prescribes what is good for the doctor? No, he thinks about what is good for the patient. After all, it was agreed that a doctor, in the precise sense, is responsible for bodies; he's not a businessman. Isn't that what was agreed?'

Thrasy Machus assented.

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Socrates, Thrasy Machus

Book 1

And that the ship's captain, in the precise sense, was in command of sailors, not a sailor?

'Yes, that was agreed.'

'So a ship's captain or commander of this type will not think about or prescribe what is good for the ship's captain, but what is good for the sailor, for the person under his command.'

He agreed, though reluctantly.

'And so, Thrasy Machus,' I said, 'no one in any position of authority, to the extent that he is in authority, thinks about or prescribes what is good for himself, but only what is good for the person or thing under his authority -- for whose benefit he himself exercises his art or skill. Everything he says, and everything he does, is said or done with this person or thing in mind, with a view to what is good and appropriate for the person or thing under his authority.'

At this point in the argument it was obvious to everyone that the definition of justice had changed into its opposite. Thrasy Machus didn't try to answer. Instead he said: 'Tell me, Socrates, have you got a nanny?'

'I beg your pardon,' I said in some surprise. 'Shouldn't you be answering the question rather than asking things like that?'

'She takes no notice of your runny nose,' he said, 'and doesn't wipe it clean when it needs it. She can't even get you to tell the sheep from the shepherd.'

'What makes you say that?'

'You seem to imagine that shepherds, or herdsmen, are thinking about the good of their sheep or their cattle -- that they are fattening them up and looking after them with some other end in view than the good of their masters and themselves. In particular, you don't seem to realise that rulers in cities -- rulers in the true sense -- regard their subjects as their sheep, and that the only thing they're interested in, day and night, is what benefit they themselves are going to derive from them.'

Such an expert are you in the just and justice, and in the unjust and injustice, that you haven't even grasped that justice and the just are actually what is good for someone else -- good for the stronger, the ruler -- while for the one who obeys and follows, they mean harm to himself. Injustice is the opposite.

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23 The comparison of ruler to shepherd goes back to Homer, who calls the supreme king Agamemnon 'shepherd of the peoples', using the term in a benign sense. Plato will develop the comparison beyond the confines of Book 1, in the relationship between the rulers of the ideal city and their sheepdog-like auxiliaries (440d, 459c). It is also important in the political theory of his Statesman or Politics (271d-272b, 273a).
It rules over those who are truly simple-minded, the just, and its subjects do what is good for that other person—the one who is stronger. They serve him, and make him happy. They don’t make themselves happy at all.

“You can’t avoid the conclusion, my simple-minded Socrates, that a just man comes off worse than an unjust in every situation. Take contracts, for a start, where a just man goes into partnership with an unjust. When the partnership is dissolved, you’ll never find the just man better off than the unjust. No, he’ll be worse off. Or think about public life. When there are special levies to be paid to the state, the just man contributes more, and the unjust man less, from the same resources. When there are distributions to be made by the state, the just man receives nothing, while the unjust man makes a fortune. Or suppose each of them holds some public office. The outcome for the just man, even if he suffers no other loss, is that his own financial position deteriorates, since he cannot attend to it, while the fact that he is a just man stops him getting anything from public funds. On top of this, he becomes very unpopular with his friends and acquaintances when he refuses to act unjustly in order to do them a favour. The outcome for the unjust man is the exact opposite. I mean, of course, the man I was describing just now, the man who has the ability to be selfish on a large scale. He’s the one to think about, if you want to assess the extent to which it is better for him, as a private individual, to be unjust than just.

‘The easiest place of all to see it is if you look at the most complete form of injustice, the one which brings the greatest happiness to the person who practises it, and the greatest misery to those who experience it, those who would not be prepared to practise it themselves. By this I mean tyranny, which takes other people’s possessions—things which are sacred and things which are not—in secret and by open force. It does this not piecemeal but wholesale, though anyone who is caught committing one of these crimes on its own is punished and altogether disgraced. Temple-robbers, kidnappers, burglars, pickpockets and thieves, if they

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21 The eisphora was an emergency levy on capital wealth for military purposes. There was no investigative bureaucracy to conduct audits.
22 At Athens public offices were generally held by ordinary citizens in frequent rotation rather than being the province of career politicians or bureaucrats. Most were unpaid committee work. At the end of their term of office, magistrates submitted their records to public scrutiny. Charges against them and complaints from any citizen were considered by a special board and often led to penalties.
23 Temples were not only sacred places but depositories of wealth. They served the function of treasuries and, in some cases, banks.

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Socrates, Thrasymachus

Book I 343c–345b

carry out individual acts of wrongdoing, are known by the names of their crimes. But those who seize and enslave the citizens themselves, and not just their property, are not called by these terms of reproach. They are called blessed and happy, both by their fellow-citizens and by everyone else who hears about the wholesale injustice they have practised. Those who condemn injustice do so not through fear of practising it, but through fear of experiencing it. There you are, Socrates. Injustice is a thing which is stronger, more free and more powerful than justice, so long as it is practised on a large enough scale. So as I said in the first place, justice is in fact what is good for the stronger, whereas injustice is what is profitable and good for oneself.

Thrasymachus was planning to leave after this outburst, having deluged our ears, like some bath attendant, with this long, relentless explanation. But the people who were there wouldn’t let him go. They forced him to stay and justify what he had said. And I too, for my part, was most insistent. ‘My dear Thrasy Machus,’ I said to him, ‘you can’t be intending to chuck a speech like that at us, and then go away without properly telling us, or finding out, whether or not that is how things are.

Do you think it’s a trivial matter, this definition we are after? Far from it. We are trying to define the whole conduct of life—how each of us can live his life in the most profitable way.’

‘Have I said anything to suggest that I disagree?’ Thrasy Machus asked.

‘It doesn’t look as if you agree,’ I said. ‘Either that or you have no concern for us, and don’t care whether we live better or worse lives as a result of our ignorance of what you claim to know. Please, my friend, enlighten us as well. It will be no bad investment for you to do a favour to a gathering as large as we are. For my own part, I have to say that I’m not convinced. I don’t think injustice is something more profitable than justice, even if it’s given a free hand and not prevented from doing what it wants. No, my friend, let him be unjust, let him have the power to act unjustly, whether in secret or in open warfare, still the unjust man cannot convey me that injustice is something more profitable than justice.

Maybe someone else here feels the same. I may not be the only one. So please be so good as to convince us fully that valuing justice more than injustice is not the right strategy for us.’

‘How am I to persuade you?’ he asked. ‘If you’re not convinced by what I said just now, what more can I do for you? Do you want me to sit here and cram the argument in with a spoon?’