THE REPUBLIC

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AN INTRODUCTION

BY TOM BUTLER-BOWDON

> *"Until kings are philosophers, or philosophers are kings, cities will never cease from ill: no, nor the human race; nor will our ideal polity ever come into being."*

Despite being over 16 centuries old, *The Republic* is no dry political text, but still has much to say to the contemporary person about what it means to live the good life.

The word *dikaiosunē* lies at the heart of the book. It does not have a direct English translation, but loosely means moral virtue, both at the personal and societal levels. In this Introduction we look at the basic meaning of justice for Plato in relation to the individual, before considering the characteristics of his ideal just state. Though it lays out his plans for a perfect society, we will see how Plato's most famous work can also be a guide for success as a person.

Plato's ideal state or society is characterized by wisdom, courage, self-discipline and justice, qualities that a well-balanced person should also develop. Conversely, his discussion of reason, spirit and desire (the "three parts of the soul") shows how personal mental harmony is not just good for the individual, making them "just", but good for their community too.

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The Republic proceeds as a dialogue led by Socrates, who was Plato's teacher.

Across ten Books, Socrates responds with powerful logic to the questions and counter-arguments posed by Glaucon and Adeimantus, older brothers of Plato, and Polemarchus, whose home in Piraeus (the port of Athens) is where the dialogue takes place. Others include Thrasymachus, an orator, Polemarchus' brothers Lysias and Euthydemus, and Cephalus, his father.

Part of the reason for *The Republic's* undying influence is that, despite being one of the great works of Western philosophy, it is still a relatively easy read, requiring no special knowledge. We use here the well-known translation by Benjamin Jowett, an Oxford don and master of classical texts.

DOES IT PAY TO BE JUST?

The text begins with a discussion of the meaning of justice.

Cephalus argues that justice is simply telling the truth and making sure one's debts are paid. He will die a comparatively rich man, and says that one of the benefits of wealth is that one can die in peace, knowing all accounts are settled. But Socrates asks, is there not something more to truth and a good life than this?

Glaucon and Adeimantus make a case for injustice, saying that we can live to suit ourselves and get away with it, even prosper. Glaucon grants that justice is good in itself, but challenges Socrates to show how justice can be good at an individual level. Can the just person actually be happier than one who is not just? And if people can get away with it, surely they will act in unjust ways?

Glaucon evokes the story of Gyges and his golden ring. This magical ring gave Gyges the power to make himself invisible at will, and naturally enough, he uses it to do things that he could not get way with if he was visible. The story suggests that anyone with such a power would of course take what they want, sleep

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with whom they want, and so on, because they know they would never be detected. People only act justly when they fear they will be caught, Glaucon suggests, and have no interest in being good for its own sake.

Socrates' response comes in some detail, but in essence it is this: doing the right thing is its own reward, since it brings the three parts of our soul (reason, spirit and desire) into harmony. Acting justly is not an optional extra, but the axis around which human existence must turn; life is meaningless if it lacks well-intentioned action. And while justice is an absolute necessity for the individual, it is also the central plank of a good state.

Socrates tries to convey the value of justice in his retelling of the myth of Er. This is the strange story of a man killed in battle whose body did not decay after his death. The reason is that the gods had anointed Er to be the one human who would be able to witness what happens after people die, and to return to the world afterwards to tell all of what he had seen.

Er recalled that after his death, he found himself in a meadow where souls gathered who had either just spent a life on earth, or who had just descended from heaven. They are meeting to choose their next incarnation, and are given lots to decide among their possible lives. Er describes the various choices that souls make, and their impulse or reason for making them. Having chosen, Er recalls, the souls would then drink from the river of Forgetfulness and then take form on Earth. Only Er is allowed not to drink. His body never having decomposed, after this vision of the afterlife he comes alive again while awaiting the flames of the funeral pyre.

What is the point of this myth? Er noted that souls were often swayed by the chance of being a rich or famous person in their next life, while failing to choose on the basis of whether a life was *just* – or not. Those who made the most progress over many lifetimes, in terms of fulfilling their soul's potential, naturally chose the former. Socrates notes:

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> *"A man must take with him into the world below an adamantine faith in truth and right, that there too he may be undazzled by the desire of wealth or the other allurements of evil, lest, coming upon tyrannies and similar villainies, he do irremediable wrongs to others and suffer yet worse himself; but let him know how to choose the mean and avoid the extremes on either side, as far as possible, not only in this life but in all that which is to come. For this is the way of happiness."*

Always seeking the just way and the just life – "doing the right thing" – is thus the eternal route to the happy and fulfilled life. In having Socrates retell this myth, Plato presents his final nail in the coffin of the idea that justice is a noble but impractical notion. In fact, it is the *only* route to the good life.

THE BALANCED INDIVIDUAL

Plato divides the human soul into three parts: Reason, Spirit, and Desire.

Reason is the overseer of the soul and seeks the best overall outcomes; it gives us the ability to make decisions, and provides our conscience. Spirit generates ambition and enterprise, but also gives rise to feelings like anger, pride and shame. Desire is simply the basic urges for food, sleep and sex.

The individual becomes just when spirit and desire are not given free rein, but shaped and guided by reason, which is guided by knowledge of "the Good", a basic universal form. Thus we achieve balance, and our actions are naturally just and in harmony with the world around us.

A person driven only by ambition or desire may well achieve their aims, but probably at great eventual cost to their integrity of self. As Plato scholar Gail Fine notes:

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individuals were entirely subordinated to the military aims of the state. There was no conception of a separate civil society and, however admirable as a military nation, Plato sees it as corrupt and extreme.

Sparta was an anomaly, because most of the ancient Greek cities were either oligarchies or democracies. Oligarchical states were run by wealthy elites who claimed to govern for the good of the whole, but Plato believed there was a deep conflict of interest at their heart; the rich enriched themselves and the poor got poorer, creating increasing social unrest. His explanation of Tyranny will be very familiar to us: power becomes no longer vested in the state itself, but in an individual. Some tyrants come to power through popular support, but their total authority naturally corrupts, and they essentially become criminal rulers.

And Democracy? Democracies in Plato's time were not the representative governments we know today; Athenian democracy was a popular assembly of free male citizens who met regularly to vote on specific issues, and who devolved administration to a Council of Five Hundred. Plato's problem with this kind of direct democracy was that it tends towards bad decisions. Complex issues relating to foreign policy, or economics, for instance, become subject to the irrational whim of the voting bloc on any given day. Moreover, since membership of the Council was limited to a year, and no citizen could be a member more than twice, there was little strategic or long-term thinking to guide the state. Athenian leaders gained power by telling voters what they wanted to hear when they should have been charting a plan for the health of the state. Despite it being of a rather different type than today's democracy, Plato's criticism of it could almost apply to our own. The result of "freedom and plainness of speech", he has Socrates say, is that:

"… every man does what is right in his own eyes, and has his own way of life… the State is like a piece of embroidery of which the colours and figures are the manners of men,

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> *and there are many who, like women and children, prefer this variety to real beauty and excellence. The State is not one but many, like a bazaar at which you can buy anything. The great charm is, that you may do as you like; you may govern if you like, let it alone if you like; go to war and make peace if you feel disposed, and all quite irrespective of anybody else... Such is democracy;—a pleasing, lawless, various sort of government, distributing equality to equals and unequals alike."*

In short, democracy offers everything to everyone, but stands for nothing. It tends towards rule by an uneducated mob, with politicians simply telling voters what they want to hear in order to stay in power. For Plato, such a system was inherently flawed because it assumed virtue on the part of every citizen, yet virtue could only arise from knowledge, and most of the populace were not educated to a proper extent.

THE IDEAL STATE

Against this backdrop of failed systems the framework of Plato's ideal state rises. He imagines an elite group of philosophers whose sole purpose is to work for the good of the state. Brilliant, highly educated, and spiritually advanced, these philosophers would probably rather spend their time in contemplation, considering the eternal "forms" (such as Beauty or Truth) that underlie the world of appearances. Instead, they are asked to forego their all-knowing state of bliss and choose to return to the prosaic world to govern for the benefit of all.

The just state is divided into two: Guardians and Workers. The ruling class of Guardians is made up of a top tier of philosopher-rulers, and a military class called "auxiliaries" which defends the state and carries out the administrative functions decreed by the rulers. The working class keeps the state going in a material way.

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Just as an individual will not properly "work" until he or she has achieved self-balance guided by reason, so Plato suggests that we should not expect a nation or a state to be run properly by merchants, or tradesman, or soldiers, but only by those who have the best general overview of what constitutes the good in society. A society run by soldiers would be always at war and limit freedom to its citizens; a state run by businessmen would be characterized by envy and materialism; and a state run by workers would lack the intellectual breadth and depth to know what good governance is, or properly manage relations with other states. Only the properly educated generalist, trained over many years in abstract subjects (Socrates suggests ten years study of mathematics before moving onto philosophy), can govern well. Yet practical knowledge of administration is the least of their requirements. The basic condition of superiority and fitness to govern is knowledge of the essential spiritual Forms of Justice, the Good, Beauty, Temperance, which manifest themselves in actual circumstances.

Plato outlines an authoritarian state, but in a positive paternal sense. The Guardians must put the good of the state above any kind of personal desire. Plato believed that private property, for instance, made people greedy and defensive of their interests, so Socrates proposes that the Guardians are provided for by the state so they are not swayed by private concerns and interests. Similarly, he notes that social unity is only possible if the worker class is looked after to the extent that it can carry out its jobs without complaint. Both poverty and wealth would upset society's equilibrium.

Socrates observes that the just state will exhibit four qualities or virtues: wisdom, courage, discipline or good sense, and justice. Wisdom comes from the rulers, courage from the auxiliaries, and self-discipline from general agreement about how the state is to be ordered. Justice is the acceptance that everyone has a role to

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play in society. If we are a merchant, for instance, we respect the role of the military or the rulers, and vice versa.

THE CONTROL OF CULTURE FOR GOOD ENDS

Given that his philosopher-kings need decades of education and personal development before they are ready to rule, Plato required a system of public education that would ensure the health of the state.

Socrates goes to some length to show how the great poets and stories normally used to inculcate moral action are not actually up to the task. In Plato's time there was no Bible or equivalent religious text to act as moral guide, so it was the work of poets that filled this role. Socrates' argument is that:

> *"... poetry feeds and waters the passions instead of drying them up; she lets them rule, although they ought to be controlled, if mankind are ever to increase in happiness and virtue."*

Homer's depiction of the horrors of the afterlife, Socrates believes, only puts fear into people's minds, as does any kind of lament. He would censor the stories told to children so that their brains are not filled with negative images. Rather, education must focus on instilling the idea of the Good. The citizenry should be exposed only to literature that does not glorify lying, or inconstancy, lack of self-control, or violence, for these will naturally weaken and corrupt minds, leading to wreck the ship of state. Most grievous are the stories in which unjust characters are said to be happy, or to win at the cost of the just, or that suggest being good is a disadvantage.

The just person, Socrates notes, wishes to *be* good intrinsically, not just to seem good:

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> *"There must be no seeming, for if he seem to be just he will be honoured and rewarded, and then we shall not know whether he is just for the sake of justice or for the sake of honours and rewards."*

Literature, Socrates says, should emphasize the advantages that justice brings those who follow it, no matter what seems to be the case on the surface.

Attempting to counter the fear in the gods in ancient times, Socrates argues that God, contrary to general opinion, is not (as Zeus is portrayed) in charge of dispensing good and evil in the world, but is responsible only for the Good. Indeed, a basic principle of the ideal state must be that "God is the cause, not of all things, but only of good". In contrast to some of the poets' stories about Gods taking the shape of humans or sea creatures and so on, which only create fear and confusion about divine nature, God must be portrayed as perfect, incorruptible, totally without deceit or falsehood and only ever acting for good.

Plato's wish to censor culture may seem totalitarian, but we can understand it in the context of a time when the state's vitality and success was held up as the highest good. He felt justified in proposing a system that would ensure the state's strength by way of the moral firmness of its people. In fact, Plato is not different to today's politicians who lament the role that value-free entertainment in films and television, violent video games and pornography have on the moral fibre of society. Though often lampooned for being prudes, they echo Plato in not seeking censorship for reasons of power, but so that individual potential not be wasted.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Though he may seem overbearing on the cultural front, Plato was remarkably farsighted when it came to sexual equality. Through powerful logic he shows how the estimation of women as weak

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> *that this is the power upon which he who would act rationally either in public or private life must have his eye fixed."*

Elsewhere, he describes the journey out of the cave as a movement from "becoming" to "being", from conditioned to absolute reality; from the worldly experience of being human to the pure light of reality.

Having had this experience, Socrates says, is it any wonder that those philosophers who have seen the essential Form of Justice might despair at descending back into the world to administer justice in real courts of law, which is filled with people who have no appreciation of what Justice is?

Well they might, but it is their duty to discern the shadows from the truth, ensuring that they will not do such things as starting wars for power's sake, but will work tirelessly for the long-term benefit of the state and people. Socrates sagely notes to Glaucon that, "the State in which the rulers are most reluctant to govern is always the best and most quietly governed, and the State in which they are most eager, the worst."

FINAL COMMENTS

It is easy to paint Plato as an elitist or snob who supported a rigidly hierarchical society. The philosopher of science Karl Popper famously said that Plato was an enemy of the open society.

But Plato's model can be seen another way.

History since Plato has been full of disastrous Marxist worker-governments, brutal military juntas, and corrupt regimes that loot the state for all its worth, and to a lesser extent democratic states hijacked by special interests which advance themselves at the expense of the whole. Contrast this with the Platonic model which provides for philosopher-rulers specifically trained to have the welfare of the whole as their highest concern, with power for power's sake completely beyond the pale.

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There is a gravitas and pleasing unity to Plato's view of justice, both person and polis, that stands in contrast to today's political arena in which citizens rear up at any suggestion that they should forego some of their rights or privileges for the good of the state overall. John F. Kennedy's famous exhortation, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country", is a faint echo of Plato's outlook, and now seems almost quaint.[1] Plato would not have been impressed with today's democracies. Even in his time he saw them as chaotic and prone to be captured by certain groups or classes, and today would note their lack of a sense of planning for the long term and working for the highest benefit of all. Instead we have politicians toadying to their local electorates, being swayed by lobbyists, pork-barrelling or doing favours to others in their party to ensure their promotion or survival. In light of democracy's weaknesses, Platonic autocracy by a well-intentioned elite does not look so ridiculous.

Does Plato's template for the just and balanced individual still work for us today? In a culture which seems to offer easy routes to every kind of pleasure, and which encourages us to express emotions with abandon, his emphasis on allowing reason to be our ruler can seem austere. Yet the fruits of this reign will be the same for a 21st-century person as it was for the individual of ancient Greece: wisdom, courage and right action.

Plato's parable of the cave is a precious reminder that most of us go through life chasing shadows and believing in appearances, when beyond the superficial world of the senses awaits timeless and perfect truth. Plato has Socrates make the case for philosophers being the only ones who can ascertain this truth

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1 Are there any expressions of Plato's ideal state today? The closest would be technocratic governments with limited or no democracy which nevertheless produce reasonably prosperous and integrated societies. Singapore, which places great emphasis on the quality and training of its top public servants, comes to mind, but there are no large states run along these lines.

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through their study of the Forms, but today, of course, we all have access to education, books, and ethical or spiritual teachings, and each of us is equipped to contemplate the eternal.

Accordingly, *The Republic* opens the way for everyone to live according to such timeless truths, instead of existing simply for pleasure or to gain the upper hand over others. The very fact that you are reading this book makes it more likely that you have seen the cave of perception for what it is, and now have the opportunity to apprehend what is lasting and true.

Tom Butler-Bowdon

SOURCES

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Tom Butler-Bowdon is the author of five best-selling books on the classic writings in the personal development field. He has been described by *USA Today* as "a true scholar of this type of literature".

His first book, *50 Self-Help Classics*, won the 2004 Benjamin Franklin Award. *50 Success Classics* followed, looking at the landmark works in motivation and leadership from Napoleon Hill to Nelson Mandela. Tom's third book, *50 Spiritual Classics*, provides commentaries on famous writings and authors in personal awakening, from Mother Teresa to Carl Jung to Eckhart Tolle. With *50 Psychology Classics* (2007) and *50 Prosperity Classics* (2008), the series has been translated into 22 languages. *50 Philosophy Classics* will be published in 2012.

Tom is a graduate of the London School of Economics and the University of Sydney, and lives in Oxford, England. His website, www.Butler-Bowdon.com, has an array of free self-development resources.

- Readers can receive a free bonus philosophy book commentary written by Tom by sending an email to Tom@Butler-Bowdon.com with "Republic" in the title bar.
- See also Capstone's editions of *Think and Grow Rich*, the classic motivational text by Napoleon Hill, *The Science of Getting Rich* by Wallace Wattles, *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu,

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The Wealth of Nations by Adam Smith, *The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli, and *Tao Te Ching* by Lao Tzu, all of which contain Introductions by Tom Butler-Bowdon.

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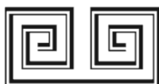

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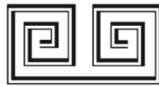
PERSONS OF THE DIALOGUE



Socrates, who is the narrator.
Glaucon
Adeimantus
Polemarchus
Cephalus
Thrasymachus
Cleitophon
And others who are mute auditors.

The scene is laid in the house of Cephalus at the Piraeus; and the whole dialogue is narrated by Socrates the day after it actually took place to Timaeus, Hermocrates, Critias, and a nameless person, who are introduced in the Timaeus.

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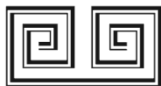
BOOK I



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the 'threshold of old age' – Is life harder towards the end, or what report do you give of it?"

"I will tell you, Socrates," he said, "what my own feeling is. Men of my age flock together; we are birds of a feather, as the old proverb says; and at our meetings the tale of my acquaintance commonly is – I cannot eat, I cannot drink; the pleasures of youth and love are fled away: there was a good time once, but now that is gone, and life is no longer life. Some complain of the slights which are put upon them by relations, and they will tell you sadly of how many evils their old age is the cause. But to me, Socrates, these complainers seem to blame that which is not really in fault. For if old age were the cause, I too being old, and every other old man, would have felt as they do. But this is not my own experience, nor that of others whom I have known. How well I remember the aged poet Sophocles, when in answer to the question, 'How does love suit with age, Sophocles, – are you still the man you were?' 'Peace,' he replied; 'most gladly have I escaped the thing of which you speak; I feel as if I had escaped from a mad and furious master.' His words have often occurred to my mind since, and they seem as good to me now as at the time when he uttered them. For certainly old age has a great sense of calm and freedom; when the passions relax their hold, then, as Sophocles says, we are freed from the grasp not of one mad master only, but of many. The truth is, Socrates, that these regrets, and also the complaints about relations, are to be attributed to the same cause, which is not old age, but men's characters and tempers; for he who is of a calm and happy nature will hardly feel the pressure of age, but to him who is of an opposite disposition youth and age are equally a burden."

I listened in admiration, and wanting to draw him out, that he might go on – "Yes, Cephalus," I said: "but I rather suspect that people in general are not convinced by you when you speak thus; they think that old age sits lightly upon you, not because of your happy disposition, but because you are rich, and wealth is well known to be a great comforter."

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"You are right," he replied; "they are not convinced: and there is something in what they say; not, however, so much as they imagine. I might answer them as Themistocles answered the Seriphian who was abusing him and saying that he was famous, not for his own merits but because he was an Athenian: 'If you had been a native of my country or I of yours, neither of us would have been famous.' And to those who are not rich and are impatient of old age, the same reply may be made; for to the good poor man old age cannot be a light burden, nor can a bad rich man ever have peace with himself."

"May I ask, Cephalus, whether your fortune was for the most part inherited or acquired by you?"

"Acquired! Socrates; do you want to know how much I acquired? In the art of making money I have been midway between my father and grandfather: for my grandfather, whose name I bear, doubled and trebled the value of his patrimony, that which he inherited being much what I possess now; but my father Lysanias reduced the property below what it is at present: and I shall be satisfied if I leave to these my sons not less but a little more than I received."

"That was why I asked you the question," I replied, "because I see that you are indifferent about money, which is a characteristic rather of those who have inherited their fortunes than of those who have acquired them; the makers of fortunes have a second love of money as a creation of their own, resembling the affection of authors for their own poems, or of parents for their children, besides that natural love of it for the sake of use and profit which is common to them and all men. And hence they are very bad company, for they can talk about nothing but the praises of wealth."

"That is true," he said.

"Yes, that is very true, but may I ask another question? – What do you consider to be the greatest blessing which you have reaped from your wealth?"

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"One," he said, "of which I could not expect easily to convince others. For let me tell you, Socrates, that when a man thinks himself to be near death, fears and cares enter into his mind which he never had before; the tales of a world below and the punishment which is exacted there of deeds done here were once a laughing matter to him, but now he is tormented with the thought that they may be true: either from the weakness of age, or because he is now drawing nearer to that other place, he has a clearer view of these things; suspicions and alarms crowd thickly upon him, and he begins to reflect and consider what wrongs he has done to others. And when he finds that the sum of his transgressions is great he will many a time like a child start up in his sleep for fear, and he is filled with dark forebodings. But to him who is conscious of no sin, sweet hope, as Pindar charmingly says, is the kind nurse of his age:

"'Hope,' he says, 'cherishes the soul of him who lives in justice and holiness, and is the nurse of his age and the companion of his journey; – hope which is mightiest to sway the restless soul of man.'

"How admirable are his words! And the great blessing of riches, I do not say to every man, but to a good man, is, that he has had no occasion to deceive or to defraud others, either intentionally or unintentionally; and when he departs to the world below he is not in any apprehension about offerings due to the gods or debts which he owes to men. Now to this peace of mind the possession of wealth greatly contributes; and therefore I say, that, setting one thing against another, of the many advantages which wealth has to give, to a man of sense this is in my opinion the greatest."

"Well said, Cephalus," I replied; "but as concerning justice, what is it? – to speak the truth and to pay your debts – no more than this? And even to this are there not exceptions? Suppose that a friend when in his right mind has deposited arms with me and he asks for them when he is not in his right mind, ought I to give them back to him? No one would say that I ought or that I should be right in doing so, any more than they would say that I ought always to speak the truth to one who is in his condition."

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"You are quite right," he replied.

"But then," I said, "speaking the truth and paying your debts is not a correct definition of justice."

"Quite correct, Socrates, if Simonides is to be believed," said Polemarchus interposing.

"I fear," said Cephalus, "that I must go now, for I have to look after the sacrifices, and I hand over the argument to Polemarchus and the company."

"Is not Polemarchus your heir?" I said.

"To be sure," he answered, and went away laughing to the sacrifices.

"Tell me then, O thou heir of the argument, what did Simonides say, and according to you truly say, about justice?"

"He said that the repayment of a debt is just, and in saying so he appears to me to be right."

"I should be sorry to doubt the word of such a wise and inspired man, but his meaning, though probably clear to you, is the reverse of clear to me. For he certainly does not mean, as we were just now saying, that I ought to return a deposit of arms or of anything else to one who asks for it when he is not in his right senses; and yet a deposit cannot be denied to be a debt."

"True."

"Then when the person who asks me is not in his right mind I am by no means to make the return?"

"Certainly not."

"When Simonides said that the repayment of a debt was justice, he did not mean to include that case?"

"Certainly not; for he thinks that a friend ought always to do good to a friend and never evil."

"You mean that the return of a deposit of gold which is to the injury of the receiver, if the two parties are friends, is not the repayment of a debt, – that is what you would imagine him to say?"

"Yes."

"And are enemies also to receive what we owe to them?"

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"To be sure," he said, "they are to receive what we owe them, and an enemy, as I take it, owes to an enemy that which is due or proper to him – that is to say, evil."

"Simonides, then, after the manner of poets, would seem to have spoken darkly of the nature of justice; for he really meant to say that justice is the giving to each man what is proper to him, and this he termed a debt."

"That must have been his meaning," he said.

"By heaven!" I replied; "and if we asked him what due or proper thing is given by medicine, and to whom, what answer do you think that he would make to us?"

"He would surely reply that medicine gives drugs and meat and drink to human bodies."

"And what due or proper thing is given by cookery, and to what?"

"Seasoning to food."

"And what is that which justice gives, and to whom?"

"If, Socrates, we are to be guided at all by the analogy of the preceding instances, then justice is the art which gives good to friends and evil to enemies."

"That is his meaning then?"

"I think so."

"And who is best able to do good to his friends and evil to his enemies in time of sickness?"

"The physician."

"Or when they are on a voyage, amid the perils of the sea?"

"The pilot."

"And in what sort of actions or with a view to what result is the just man most able to do harm to his enemy and good to his friend?"

"In going to war against the one and in making alliances with the other."

"But when a man is well, my dear Polemarchus, there is no need of a physician?"

"No."

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"Then after all the just man has turned out to be a thief. And this is a lesson which I suspect you must have learnt out of Homer; for he, speaking of Autolycus, the maternal grandfather of Odysseus, who is a favourite of his, affirms that 'He was excellent above all men in theft and perjury.'"

"And so, you and Homer and Simonides are agreed that justice is an art of theft; to be practised however 'for the good of friends and for the harm of enemies,' – that was what you were saying?"

"No, certainly not that, though I do not now know what I did say; but I still stand by the latter words."

"Well, there is another question: By friends and enemies do we mean those who are so really, or only in seeming?"

"Surely, he said, a man may be expected to love those whom he thinks good, and to hate those whom he thinks evil."

"Yes, but do not persons often err about good and evil: many who are not good seem to be so, and conversely?"

"That is true."

"Then to them the good will be enemies and the evil will be their friends?"

"True."

"And in that case they will be right in doing good to the evil and evil to the good?"

"Clearly."

"But the good are just and would not do an injustice?"

"True."

"Then according to your argument it is just to injure those who do no wrong?"

"Nay, Socrates; the doctrine is immoral."

"Then I suppose that we ought to do good to the just and harm to the unjust?"

"I like that better."

"But see the consequence: – Many a man who is ignorant of human nature has friends who are bad friends, and in that case he ought to do harm to them; and he has good enemies whom he

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ought to benefit; but, if so, we shall be saying the very opposite of that which we affirmed to be the meaning of Simonides."

"Very true," he said: "and I think that we had better correct an error into which we seem to have fallen in the use of the words 'friend' and 'enemy.'"

"What was the error, Polemarchus?" I asked.

"We assumed that he is a friend who seems to be or who is thought good."

"And how is the error to be corrected?"

"We should rather say that he is a friend who is, as well as seems, good; and that he who seems only, and is not good, only seems to be and is not a friend; and of an enemy the same may be said."

"You would argue that the good are our friends and the bad our enemies?"

"Yes."

"And instead of saying simply as we did at first, that it is just to do good to our friends and harm to our enemies, we should further say: It is just to do good to our friends when they are good and harm to our enemies when they are evil?"

"Yes, that appears to me to be the truth."

"But ought the just to injure any one at all?"

"Undoubtedly he ought to injure those who are both wicked and his enemies."

"When horses are injured, are they improved or deteriorated?"

"The latter."

"Deteriorated, that is to say, in the good qualities of horses, not of dogs?"

"Yes, of horses."

"And dogs are deteriorated in the good qualities of dogs, and not of horses?"

"Of course."

"And will not men who are injured be deteriorated in that which is the proper virtue of man?"

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"Certainly."

"And that human virtue is justice?"

"To be sure."

"Then men who are injured are of necessity made unjust?"

"That is the result."

"But can the musician by his art make men unmusical?"

"Certainly not."

"Or the horseman by his art make them bad horsemen?"

"Impossible."

"And can the just by justice make men unjust, or speaking generally, can the good by virtue make them bad?"

"Assuredly not."

"Any more than heat can produce cold?"

"It cannot."

"Or drought moisture?"

"Clearly not."

"Nor can the good harm any one?"

"Impossible."

"And the just is the good?"

"Certainly."

"Then to injure a friend or any one else is not the act of a just man, but of the opposite, who is the unjust?"

"I think that what you say is quite true, Socrates."

"Then if a man says that justice consists in the repayment of debts, and that good is the debt which a just man owes to his friends, and evil the debt which he owes to his enemies, – to say this is not wise; for it is not true, if, as has been clearly shown, the injuring of another can be in no case just."

"I agree with you," said Polemarchus.

"Then you and I are prepared to take up arms against any one who attributes such a saying to Simonides or Bias or Pittacus, or any other wise man or seer?"

"I am quite ready to do battle at your side," he said.

"Shall I tell you whose I believe the saying to be?"

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"Whose?"

"I believe that Periander or Perdiccas or Xerxes or Ismenias the Theban, or some other rich and mighty man, who had a great opinion of his own power, was the first to say that justice is 'doing good to your friends and harm to your enemies.'"

"Most true," he said.

"Yes," I said; "but if this definition of justice also breaks down, what other can be offered?"

Several times in the course of the discussion Thrasymachus had made an attempt to get the argument into his own hands, and had been put down by the rest of the company, who wanted to hear the end. But when Polemarchus and I had done speaking and there was a pause, he could no longer hold his peace; and, gathering himself up, he came at us like a wild beast, seeking to devour us. We were quite panic-stricken at the sight of him.

He roared out to the whole company: "What folly, Socrates, has taken possession of you all? And why, sillybillies, do you knock under to one another? I say that if you want really to know what justice is, you should not only ask but answer, and you should not seek honour to yourself from the refutation of an opponent, but have your own answer; for there is many a one who can ask and cannot answer. And now I will not have you say that justice is duty or advantage or profit or gain or interest, for this sort of nonsense will not do for me; I must have clearness and accuracy."

I was panic-stricken at his words, and could not look at him without trembling. Indeed I believe that if I had not fixed my eye upon him, I should have been struck dumb: but when I saw his fury rising, I looked at him first, and was therefore able to reply to him.

"Thrasymachus," I said, with a quiver, "don't be hard upon us. Polemarchus and I may have been guilty of a little mistake in the argument, but I can assure you that the error was not intentional. If we were seeking for a piece of gold, you would not imagine that we were 'knocking under to one another,' and so losing our chance of finding it. And why, when we are seeking for justice, a thing more

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precious than many pieces of gold, do you say that we are weakly yielding to one another and not doing our utmost to get at the truth? Nay, my good friend, we are most willing and anxious to do so, but the fact is that we cannot. And if so, you people who know all things should pity us and not be angry with us."

"How characteristic of Socrates!" he replied, with a bitter laugh; – "that's your ironical style! Did I not foresee – have I not already told you, that whatever he was asked he would refuse to answer, and try irony or any other shuffle, in order that he might avoid answering?"

"You are a philosopher, Thrasymachus," I replied, "and well know that if you ask a person what numbers make up twelve, taking care to prohibit him whom you ask from answering twice six, or three times four, or six times two, or four times three, 'for this sort of nonsense will not do for me,' – then obviously, if that is your way of putting the question, no one can answer you. But suppose that he were to retort, 'Thrasymachus, what do you mean? If one of these numbers which you interdict be the true answer to the question, am I falsely to say some other number which is not the right one? – is that your meaning?' – How would you answer him?"

"Just as if the two cases were at all alike!" he said.

"Why should they not be?" I replied; "and even if they are not, but only appear to be so to the person who is asked, ought he not to say what he thinks, whether you and I forbid him or not?"

"I presume then that you are going to make one of the interdicted answers?"

"I dare say that I may, notwithstanding the danger, if upon reflection I approve of any of them."

"But what if I give you an answer about justice other and better, he said, than any of these? What do you deserve to have done to you?"

"Done to me! – as becomes the ignorant, I must learn from the wise – that is what I deserve to have done to me."

"What, and no payment! a pleasant notion!"

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"I will; and first tell me, Do you admit that it is just for subjects to obey their rulers?"

"I do."

"But are the rulers of states absolutely infallible, or are they sometimes liable to err?"

"To be sure," he replied, "they are liable to err."

"Then in making their laws they may sometimes make them rightly, and sometimes not?"

"True."

"When they make them rightly, they make them agreeably to their interest; when they are mistaken, contrary to their interest; you admit that?"

"Yes."

"And the laws which they make must be obeyed by their subjects, – and that is what you call justice?"

"Doubtless."

"Then justice, according to your argument, is not only obedience to the interest of the stronger but the reverse?"

"What is that you are saying?" he asked.

"I am only repeating what you are saying, I believe. But let us consider: Have we not admitted that the rulers may be mistaken about their own interest in what they command, and also that to obey them is justice? Has not that been admitted?"

"Yes."

"Then you must also have acknowledged justice not to be for the interest of the stronger, when the rulers unintentionally command things to be done which are to their own injury. For if, as you say, justice is the obedience which the subject renders to their commands, in that case, O wisest of men, is there any escape from the conclusion that the weaker are commanded to do, not what is for the interest, but what is for the injury of the stronger?"

"Nothing can be clearer, Socrates," said Polemarchus.

"Yes," said Cleitophon, interposing, "if you are allowed to be his witness."

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"But there is no need of any witness," said Polemarchus, "for Thrasymachus himself acknowledges that rulers may sometimes command what is not for their own interest, and that for subjects to obey them is justice."

"Yes, Polemarchus, – Thrasymachus said that for subjects to do what was commanded by their rulers is just."

"Yes, Cleitophon, but he also said that justice is the interest of the stronger, and, while admitting both these propositions, he further acknowledged that the stronger may command the weaker who are his subjects to do what is not for his own interest; whence follows that justice is the injury quite as much as the interest of the stronger."

"But," said Cleitophon, "he meant by the interest of the stronger what the stronger thought to be his interest, – this was what the weaker had to do; and this was affirmed by him to be justice."

"Those were not his words," rejoined Polemarchus.

"Never mind," I replied, "if he now says that they are, let us accept his statement. Tell me, Thrasymachus, I said, did you mean by justice what the stronger thought to be his interest, whether really so or not?"

"Certainly not, he said. Do you suppose that I call him who is mistaken the stronger at the time when he is mistaken?"

"Yes," I said, "my impression was that you did so, when you admitted that the ruler was not infallible but might be sometimes mistaken."

"You argue like an informer, Socrates. Do you mean, for example, that he who is mistaken about the sick is a physician in that he is mistaken? or that he who errs in arithmetic or grammar is an arithmetician or grammarian at the time when he is making the mistake, in respect of the mistake? True, we say that the physician or arithmetician or grammarian has made a mistake, but this is only a way of speaking; for the fact is that neither the grammarian nor any other person of skill ever makes a mistake in so far as he is what his name implies; they none of them err unless their skill fails

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them, and then they cease to be skilled artists. No artist or sage or ruler errs at the time when he is what his name implies; though he is commonly said to err, and I adopted the common mode of speaking. But to be perfectly accurate, since you are such a lover of accuracy, we should say that the ruler, in so far as he is a ruler, is unerring, and, being unerring, always commands that which is for his own interest; and the subject is required to execute his commands; and therefore, as I said at first and now repeat, justice is the interest of the stronger."

"Indeed, Thrasymachus, and do I really appear to you to argue like an informer?"

"Certainly," he replied.

"And do you suppose that I ask these questions with any design of injuring you in the argument?"

"Nay, he replied, 'suppose' is not the word – I know it; but you will be found out, and by sheer force of argument you will never prevail."

"I shall not make the attempt, my dear man; but to avoid any misunderstanding occurring between us in future, let me ask, in what sense do you speak of a ruler or stronger whose interest, as you were saying, he being the superior, it is just that the inferior should execute – is he a ruler in the popular or in the strict sense of the term?"

"In the strictest of all senses," he said. "And now cheat and play the informer if you can; I ask no quarter at your hands. But you never will be able, never."

"And do you imagine," I said, "that I am such a madman as to try and cheat, Thrasymachus? I might as well shave a lion."

"Why," he said, "you made the attempt a minute ago, and you failed."

"Enough," I said, "of these civilities. It will be better that I should ask you a question: Is the physician, taken in that strict sense of which you are speaking, a healer of the sick or a maker of money? And remember that I am now speaking of the true physician."

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"A healer of the sick," he replied.

"And the pilot – that is to say, the true pilot – is he a captain of sailors or a mere sailor?"

"A captain of sailors."

"The circumstance that he sails in the ship is not to be taken into account; neither is he to be called a sailor; the name pilot by which he is distinguished has nothing to do with sailing, but is significant of his skill and of his authority over the sailors."

"Very true," he said.

"Now, I said, every art has an interest?"

"Certainly."

"For which the art has to consider and provide?"

"Yes, that is the aim of art."

"And the interest of any art is the perfection of it – this and nothing else?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean what I may illustrate negatively by the example of the body. Suppose you were to ask me whether the body is self-sufficing or has wants, I should reply: Certainly the body has wants; for the body may be ill and require to be cured, and has therefore interests to which the art of medicine ministers; and this is the origin and intention of medicine, as you will acknowledge. Am I not right?"

"Quite right," he replied.

"But is the art of medicine or any other art faulty or deficient in any quality in the same way that the eye may be deficient in sight or the ear fail of hearing, and therefore requires another art to provide for the interests of seeing and hearing – has art in itself, I say, any similar liability to fault or defect, and does every art require another supplementary art to provide for its interests, and that another and another without end? Or have the arts to look only after their own interests? Or have they no need either of themselves or of another? – having no faults or defects, they have no need to correct them, either by the exercise of their own art or of any other; they have only to consider the interest of their subject-matter. For

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every art remains pure and faultless while remaining true – that is to say, while perfect and unimpaired. Take the words in your precise sense, and tell me whether I am not right."

"Yes, clearly."

"Then medicine does not consider the interest of medicine, but the interest of the body?"

"True," he said.

"Nor does the art of horsemanship consider the interests of the art of horsemanship, but the interests of the horse; neither do any other arts care for themselves, for they have no needs; they care only for that which is the subject of their art?"

"True," he said.

"But surely, Thrasymachus, the arts are the superiors and rulers of their own subjects?"

To this he assented with a good deal of reluctance.

"Then," I said, "no science or art considers or enjoins the interest of the stronger or superior, but only the interest of the subject and weaker?"

He made an attempt to contest this proposition also, but finally acquiesced.

"Then," I continued, "no physician, in so far as he is a physician, considers his own good in what he prescribes, but the good of his patient; for the true physician is also a ruler having the human body as a subject, and is not a mere money-maker; that has been admitted?"

"Yes."

"And the pilot likewise, in the strict sense of the term, is a ruler of sailors and not a mere sailor?"

"That has been admitted."

"And such a pilot and ruler will provide and prescribe for the interest of the sailor who is under him, and not for his own or the ruler's interest?"

He gave a reluctant "Yes."

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small a matter in your eyes – to determine how life may be passed by each one of us to the greatest advantage?"

"And do I differ from you," he said, "as to the importance of the enquiry?"

"You appear rather," I replied, "to have no care or thought about us, Thrasymachus – whether we live better or worse from not knowing what you say you know, is to you a matter of indifference. Prithee, friend, do not keep your knowledge to yourself; we are a large party; and any benefit which you confer upon us will be amply rewarded. For my own part I openly declare that I am not convinced, and that I do not believe injustice to be more gainful than justice, even if uncontrolled and allowed to have free play. For, granting that there may be an unjust man who is able to commit injustice either by fraud or force, still this does not convince me of the superior advantage of injustice, and there may be others who are in the same predicament with myself. Perhaps we may be wrong; if so, you in your wisdom should convince us that we are mistaken in preferring justice to injustice."

"And how am I to convince you," he said, "if you are not already convinced by what I have just said; what more can I do for you? Would you have me put the proof bodily into your souls?"

"Heaven forbid!" I said; "I would only ask you to be consistent; or, if you change, change openly and let there be no deception. For I must remark, Thrasymachus, if you will recall what was previously said, that although you began by defining the true physician in an exact sense, you did not observe a like exactness when speaking of the shepherd; you thought that the shepherd as a shepherd tends the sheep not with a view to their own good, but like a mere diner or banquetter with a view to the pleasures of the table; or, again, as a trader for sale in the market, and not as a shepherd. Yet surely the art of the shepherd is concerned only with the good of his subjects; he has only to provide the best for them, since the perfection of the art is already ensured whenever all the requirements of it are satisfied. And that was what I was saying just now about the ruler. I

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conceived that the art of the ruler, considered as ruler, whether in a state or in private life, could only regard the good of his flock or subjects; whereas you seem to think that the rulers in states, that is to say, the true rulers, like being in authority."

"Think! Nay, I am sure of it."

"Then why in the case of lesser offices do men never take them willingly without payment, unless under the idea that they govern for the advantage not of themselves but of others? Let me ask you a question: Are not the several arts different, by reason of their each having a separate function? And, my dear illustrious friend, do say what you think, that we may make a little progress."

"Yes, that is the difference," he replied.

"And each art gives us a particular good and not merely a general one – medicine, for example, gives us health; navigation, safety at sea, and so on?"

"Yes," he said.

"And the art of payment has the special function of giving pay: but we do not confuse this with other arts, any more than the art of the pilot is to be confused with the art of medicine, because the health of the pilot may be improved by a sea voyage. You would not be inclined to say, would you, that navigation is the art of medicine, at least if we are to adopt your exact use of language?"

"Certainly not."

"Or because a man is in good health when he receives pay you would not say that the art of payment is medicine?"

"I should not."

"Nor would you say that medicine is the art of receiving pay because a man takes fees when he is engaged in healing?"

"Certainly not."

"And we have admitted," I said, "that the good of each art is specially confined to the art?"

"Yes."

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"Then, if there be any good which all artists have in common, that is to be attributed to something of which they all have the common use?"

"True," he replied.

"And when the artist is benefited by receiving pay the advantage is gained by an additional use of the art of pay, which is not the art professed by him?"

He gave a reluctant assent to this.

"Then the pay is not derived by the several artists from their respective arts. But the truth is, that while the art of medicine gives health, and the art of the builder builds a house, another art attends them which is the art of pay. The various arts may be doing their own business and benefiting that over which they preside, but would the artist receive any benefit from his art unless he were paid as well?"

"I suppose not."

"But does he therefore confer no benefit when he works for nothing?"

"Certainly, he confers a benefit."

"Then now, Thrasymachus, there is no longer any doubt that neither arts nor governments provide for their own interests; but, as we were before saying, they rule and provide for the interests of their subjects who are the weaker and not the stronger – to their good they attend and not to the good of the superior. And this is the reason, my dear Thrasymachus, why, as I was just now saying, no one is willing to govern; because no one likes to take in hand the reformation of evils which are not his concern without remuneration. For, in the execution of his work, and in giving his orders to another, the true artist does not regard his own interest, but always that of his subjects; and therefore in order that rulers may be willing to rule, they must be paid in one of three modes of payment, money, or honour, or a penalty for refusing."

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"What do you mean, Socrates?" said Glaucon. "The first two modes of payment are intelligible enough, but what the penalty is I do not understand, or how a penalty can be a payment."

"You mean that you do not understand the nature of this payment which to the best men is the great inducement to rule? Of course you know that ambition and avarice are held to be, as indeed they are, a disgrace?"

"Very true."

"And for this reason," I said, "money and honour have no attraction for them; good men do not wish to be openly demanding payment for governing and so to get the name of hirelings, nor by secretly helping themselves out of the public revenues to get the name of thieves. And not being ambitious they do not care about honour. Wherefore necessity must be laid upon them, and they must be induced to serve from the fear of punishment. And this, as I imagine, is the reason why the forwardness to take office, instead of waiting to be compelled, has been deemed dishonourable. Now the worst part of the punishment is that he who refuses to rule is liable to be ruled by one who is worse than himself. And the fear of this, as I conceive, induces the good to take office, not because they would, but because they cannot help – not under the idea that they are going to have any benefit or enjoyment themselves, but as a necessity, and because they are not able to commit the task of ruling to any one who is better than themselves, or indeed as good. For there is reason to think that if a city were composed entirely of good men, then to avoid office would be as much an object of contention as to obtain office is at present; then we should have plain proof that the true ruler is not meant by nature to regard his own interest, but that of his subjects; and every one who knew this would choose rather to receive a benefit from another than to have the trouble of conferring one. So far am I from agreeing with Thrasymachus that justice is the interest of the stronger. This latter question need not be further discussed at present; but when Thrasymachus says that the life of the unjust is more advantageous

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than that of the just, his new statement appears to me to be of a far more serious character. Which of us has spoken truly? And which sort of life, Glaucon, do you prefer?"

"I for my part deem the life of the just to be the more advantageous," he answered.

"Did you hear all the advantages of the unjust which Thrasymachus was rehearsing?"

"Yes, I heard him," he replied, "but he has not convinced me."

"Then shall we try to find some way of convincing him, if we can, that he is saying what is not true?"

"Most certainly," he replied.

"If," I said, "he makes a set speech and we make another recounting all the advantages of being just, and he answers and we rejoin, there must be a numbering and measuring of the goods which are claimed on either side, and in the end we shall want judges to decide; but if we proceed in our enquiry as we lately did, by making admissions to one another, we shall unite the offices of judge and advocate in our own persons."

"Very good," he said.

"And which method do I understand you to prefer?" I said.

"That which you propose."

"Well, then, Thrasymachus," I said, "suppose you begin at the beginning and answer me. You say that perfect injustice is more gainful than perfect justice?"

"Yes, that is what I say, and I have given you my reasons."

"And what is your view about them? Would you call one of them virtue and the other vice?"

"Certainly."

"I suppose that you would call justice virtue and injustice vice?"

"What a charming notion! So likely too, seeing that I affirm injustice to be profitable and justice not."

"What else then would you say?"

"The opposite," he replied.

"And would you call justice vice?"

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"And which is wise and which is foolish?"

"Clearly the musician is wise, and he who is not a musician is foolish."

"And he is good in as far as he is wise, and bad in as far as he is foolish?"

"Yes."

"And you would say the same sort of thing of the physician?"

"Yes."

"And do you think, my excellent friend, that a musician when he adjusts the lyre would desire or claim to exceed or go beyond a musician in the tightening and loosening the strings?"

"I do not think that he would."

"But he would claim to exceed the non-musician?"

"Of course."

"And what would you say of the physician? In prescribing meats and drinks would he wish to go beyond another physician or beyond the practice of medicine?"

"He would not."

"But he would wish to go beyond the non-physician?"

"Yes."

"And about knowledge and ignorance in general; see whether you think that any man who has knowledge ever would wish to have the choice of saying or doing more than another man who has knowledge. Would he not rather say or do the same as his like in the same case?"

"That, I suppose, can hardly be denied."

"And what of the ignorant? would he not desire to have more than either the knowing or the ignorant?"

"I dare say."

"And the knowing is wise?"

"Yes."

"And the wise is good?"

"True."

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"Then the wise and good will not desire to gain more than his like, but more than his unlike and opposite?"

"I suppose so."

"Whereas the bad and ignorant will desire to gain more than both?"

"Yes."

"But did we not say, Thrasymachus, that the unjust goes beyond both his like and unlike? Were not these your words?"

"They were."

"And you also said that the just will not go beyond his like but his unlike?"

"Yes."

"Then the just is like the wise and good, and the unjust like the evil and ignorant?"

"That is the inference."

"And each of them is such as his like is?"

"That was admitted."

"Then the just has turned out to be wise and good and the unjust evil and ignorant."

Thrasymachus made all these admissions, not fluently, as I repeat them, but with extreme reluctance; it was a hot summer's day, and the perspiration poured from him in torrents; and then I saw what I had never seen before, Thrasymachus blushing. As we were now agreed that justice was virtue and wisdom, and injustice vice and ignorance, I proceeded to another point:

"Well," I said, "Thrasymachus, that matter is now settled; but were we not also saying that injustice had strength; do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember," he said, "but do not suppose that I approve of what you are saying or have no answer; if however I were to answer, you would be quite certain to accuse me of haranguing; therefore either permit me to have my say out, or if you would rather ask, do so, and I will answer 'Very good,' as they say to story-telling old women, and will nod 'Yes' and 'No.'"

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