Book I

On his way back from the Piraeus, where he has been attending a religious festival, Socrates meets Polemarchus and goes with him to the house of his aged father, Cephalus (327a–328b). Socrates and Cephalus discuss the burdens of old age. Cephalus claims that, while these burdens are eased by wealth, it is people's character and habits that really determine whether or not their lives are hard to bear, not their age. Wealth is important mostly because it reduces the likelihood that someone will be tempted into being unjust because he is poor, and so lessens his fear of what will happen to him after he dies (328b–331b). This leads in a natural way into a discussion of what justice is, for Cephalus has suggested in his remarks that it is speaking the truth and paying one's debts. Cephalus goes off to attend to religious matters, and Polemarchus becomes heir to his argument, as he will later become heir to his estate. There follows a lengthy examination of Polemarchus, in the course of which he is forced to abandon a number of views about justice he has adopted along the way (331c–336b). One of these, suggested not by Polemarchus but by Socrates, is that virtue is a craft or techné (332d). This is also assumed in the subsequent exchange with Thrasymachus.

Thrasymachus is irritated by this examination and demands that Socrates give his own positive account of justice, instead of simply refuting other people's. Socrates claims that he cannot give such an account, because he does not know what justice is, and he persuades Thrasymachus to give an account in his place (336b–338a). The account Thrasymachus gives is that justice is the advantage of the stronger (338c). He defends this account in two separate arguments (338d–341a, 343a–344c). Socrates makes a number of attempts to refute these arguments (342c–d, 343b–347d, 348b–350c, 351a–352d, 352d–354a), but, though Thrasymachus cannot defend himself against them, they leave him unconvinced (341a–b, 349a, 350b–c, 352b, 353c, 354a). Since Glaucon, Adeimantus, and indeed Socrates himself (354b) are also dissatisfied with the outcome of Book I (358b, 367b), we must wonder how successful Plato himself thought Socrates' refutations of Thrasymachus actually were.
I went down to the Piraeus yesterday with Glaucón, the son of Aríston. I wanted to say a prayer to the goddess,¹ and I was also curious to see how they would manage the festival, since they were holding it for the first time. I thought the procession of the local residents was a fine one and that the one conducted by the Thracians was no less outstanding. After we had said our prayer and seen the procession, we started back towards Athens. Polemarchus saw us from a distance as we were setting off for home and told his slave to run and ask us to wait for him. The slave caught you, he said, please wait for him. And Glaucón replied: All right, we will.

Just then Polemarchus caught up with us. Adeimantus, Glaucón’s brother,² was with him and so were Niceratus, the son of Nícias, and some others, all of whom were apparently on their way from the procession.

Polemarchus said: It looks to me, Socrates, as if you two are starting off for Athens.

It looks the way it is, then, I said.

Do you see how many we are? he said.

I do.

Well, you must either prove stronger than we are, or you will have to stay here.

Isn’t there another alternative, namely, that we persuade you to let us go?

But could you persuade us, if we won’t listen?

Certainly not, Glaucón said.

Well, we won’t listen; you’d better make up your mind to that.

Don’t you know, Adeimantus said, that there is to be a torch race on horseback for the goddess tonight?

On horseback? I said. That’s something new. Are they going to race on horseback and hand the torches on in relays, or what?

In relays, Polemarchus said, and there will be an all-night festival that will be well worth seeing. After dinner, we’ll go out to look at it. We’ll be joined there by many of the young men, and we’ll talk. So don’t go; stay.

It seems, Glaucón said, that we’ll have to stay.

If you think so, I said, then we must.

So we went to Polemarchus’ house, and there we found Lysias and Euthydemus, the brothers of Polemarchus, Thrasymachus of Chalcidon.

1. The Thracian goddess Bendis, whose cult had recently been introduced in the Piraeus, the harbor area near Athens.
2. Glaucón and Adeimantus were Plato’s brothers. They are Socrates’ chief interlocutors after Book 1.
3. Lysias was a well-known writer of speeches for use in legal trials. Socrates discusses a speech attributed to him in the Phaedrus. Thrasymachus was a sophist, a paid teacher of oratory and virtue. The few fragments of his writings that survive are translated in Freeman, Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977). Charmantides is otherwise unknown.
5. “God ever draws together like to like” (Homer, Odyssey 17.218). See Plato, Lysis 214a–215c.
man," the poet replied, "I am very glad to have escaped from all that, like a slave who has escaped from a savage and tyrannical master." I thought at the time that he was right, and I still do, for old age brings peace and freedom from all such things. When the appetites relax and cease to importune us, everything Sophocles said comes to pass, and we escape from many mad masters. In these matters and in those concerning relatives, the real cause isn't old age, Socrates, but the way people live. If they are moderate and contented, old age, too, is only moderately onerous; if they aren’t, both old age and youth are hard to bear.

I admired him for saying that and I wanted him to tell me more, so I urged him on: When you say things like that, Cephalus, I suppose that the majority of people don’t agree, they think that you bear old age more easily not because of the way you live but because you’re wealthy, for the wealthy, they say, have many consolations.

That’s true; they don’t agree. And there is something in what they say, though not as much as they think. Themistocles’ retort is relevant here. When someone from Seriphus insulted him by saying that his high reputation was due to his city and not to himself, he replied that, had he been a Seriphian, he wouldn’t be famous, but neither would the other even if he had been an Athenian. The same applies to those who aren’t rich and find old age hard to bear: A good person wouldn’t easily bear old age if he were poor, but a bad one wouldn’t be at peace with himself even if he were wealthy.

Did you inherit most of your wealth, Cephalus, I asked, or did you make it for yourself?

What did I make for myself, Socrates, you ask. As a money-maker I’m in a sort of mean between my grandfather and my father. My grandfather and namesake inherited about the same amount of wealth as I possess but multiplied it many times. My father, Lysanias, however, diminished that amount to even less than I have now. As for me, I’m satisfied to leave my sons here not less but a little more than I inherited.

The reason I asked is that you don’t seem to love money too much. And those who haven’t made their own money are usually like you. But those who have made it for themselves are twice as fond of it as those who haven’t. Just as poets love their poems and fathers love their children, so those who have made their own money don’t just care about it because

6. Themistocles, a fifth-century Athenian statesman, was the chief architect of the Greek victory over Persia. By building up the navy, he secured Athens’ future as a naval power and also paved the way for the increased political power of the poorer classes, from which sailors were largely drawn. Seriphus is a small island in the Cyclades.

it’s useful, as other people do, but because it’s something they’ve made themselves. This makes them poor company, for they haven’t a good word to say about anything except money.

That’s true.

It certainly is. But tell me something else. What’s the greatest good you’ve received from being very wealthy?

What I have to say probably wouldn’t persuade most people. But you know, Socrates, that when someone thinks his end is near, he becomes frightened and concerned about things he didn’t fear before. It’s then that the stories we’re told about Hades, about how people who’ve been unjust here must pay the penalty there—stories he used to make fun of—twist his soul this way and that for fear they’re true. And whether because of the weakness of old age or because he is now closer to what happens in Hades and has a clearer view of it, or whatever it is, he is filled with foreboding and fear, and he examines himself to see whether he has been unjust to anyone. If he finds many injustices in his life, he awakes from sleep in terror, as children do, and lives in anticipation of bad things to come. But someone who knows that he hasn’t been unjust has sweet good hope as his constant companion—a nurse to his old age, as Pindar says, for he puts it charmingly, Socrates, when he says that when someone lives a just and pious life

Sweet hope is in his heart,
Nurse and companion to his age.
Hope, captain of the ever-twisting
Minds of mortal men.

How wonderfully well he puts that. It’s in this connection that wealth is most valuable, I’d say, not for every man but for a decent and orderly one. Wealth can do a lot to save us from having to cheat or deceive someone against our will and from having to depart for that other place in fear because we owe sacrifice to a god or money to a person. It has many other uses, but, benefit for benefit, I’d say that this is how it is most useful to a man of any understanding.

A fine sentiment, Cephalus, but, speaking of this very thing itself, namely, justice, are we to say unconditionally that it is speaking the truth and paying

7. Pindar (518–438 B.C.), a lyric poet from Boeotia, was most famous for his poems in celebration of the victors in the games, such as the Olympian and Pythian, held in various parts of Greece.

8. Unlike their usual equivalents “just” and “justice,” the adjective dikaios and the noun dikaiosuné are often used in a wider sense, better captured by our words “right” or “correct.” The opposite, adikia, then has the sense of general wrongdoing.
whatever debts one has incurred? Or is doing these things sometimes just, sometimes unjust? I mean this sort of thing, for example: Everyone would surely agree that if a sane man lends weapons to a friend and then asks for them back when he is out of his mind, the friend shouldn’t return them, and wouldn’t be acting justly if he did. Nor should anyone be willing to tell the whole truth to someone who is out of his mind.

That’s true.

Then the definition of justice isn’t speaking the truth and repaying what one has borrowed.

It certainly is, Socrates, said Polemarchus, interrupting, if indeed we’re to trust Simonides at all.9

Well, then, Cephalus said, I’ll hand over the argument to you, as I have to look after the sacrifice.

So, Polemarchus said, am I then to be your heir in everything?

You certainly are, Cephalus said, laughing, and off he went to the sacrifice.

Then tell us, heir to the argument, I said, just what Simonides stated about justice that you consider correct.

He stated that it is just to give to each what is owed to him. And it’s a fine saying, in my view.

Well, now, it isn’t easy to doubt Simonides, for he’s a wise and godlike man. But what exactly does he mean? Perhaps you know, Polemarchus, but I don’t understand him. Clearly, he doesn’t mean what we said a moment ago, that it is just to give back whatever a person has lent to you, even if he’s out of his mind when he asks for it. And yet what he has lent to you is surely something that’s owed to him, isn’t it?

Yes.

But it is absolutely not to be given to him when he’s out of his mind?

That’s true.

Then it seems that Simonides must have meant something different when he says that to return what is owed is just.

Something different indeed, by god. He means that friends owe it to their friends to do good for them, never harm.

I follow you. Someone doesn’t give a lender back what he’s owed by giving him gold, if doing so would be harmful, and both he and the lender arc friends. Isn’t that what you think Simonides meant?

It is.

But what about this? Should one also give one’s enemies whatever is owed to them?

By all means, one should give them what is owed to them. And in my view what enemies owe to each other is appropriately and precisely—something bad.

It seems then that Simonides was speaking in riddles—just like a poet!—when he said what justice is, for he thought it just to give to each what is appropriate to him, and this is what he called giving him what is owed to him.

What else did you think he meant?

Then what do you think he’d answer if someone asked him: “Simonides, which of the things that are owed or that are appropriate for someone or something to have does the craft10 we call medicine give, and to whom or what does it give them?”

It’s clear that it gives medicines, food, and drink to bodies.

And what owed or appropriate things does the craft we call cooking give, and to whom or what does it give them?

It gives seasonings to food.

Good. Now, what does the craft we call justice give, and to whom or what does it give it?

If we are to follow the previous answers, Socrates, it gives benefits to friends and does harm to enemies.

Simonides means, then, that to treat friends well and enemies badly is justice?

I believe so.

And who is most capable of treating friends well and enemies badly in matters of disease and health?

A doctor.

And who can do so best in a storm at sea?

A ship’s captain.

What about the just person? In what actions and what work is he most capable of benefiting friends and harming enemies?

In wars and alliances, I suppose.

All right. Now, when people aren’t sick, Polemarchus, a doctor is useless to them?

True.

And so is a ship’s captain to those who aren’t sailing?

Yes.

9. Simonides (c. 548–468 B.C.), a lyric and elegiac poet, was born in the Aegean island of Ceos.

10. The Greek word translated as “craft” here is techne. It has the sort of connotation for Socrates and Plato that “science” has for us. Thus fifth-century doctors tried to show that medicine is a craft, much as contemporary psychoanalysts try to convince us that psychoanalysis is a science. For further discussion see Reeve, Socrates in the Apology, 37–45.
And to people who aren't at war, a just man is useless?
No, I don't think that at all.
Justice is also useful in peacetime, then?

It is.
And so is farming, isn't it?
Yes.
For getting produce?
Yes.
And shoemaking as well?
Yes.
For getting shoes, I think you'd say?
Certainly.
Well, then, what is justice useful for getting and using in peacetime?
Contracts, Socrates.
And by contracts do you mean partnerships, or what?
I mean partnerships.
Is someone a good and useful partner in a game of checkers because he's just or because he's a checkers player?
Because he's a checkers player.
And in laying bricks and stones, is a just person a better and more useful partner than a builder?
Not at all.
In what kind of partnership, then, is a just person a better partner than a builder or a lyre-player, in the way that a lyre-player is better than a just person at hitting the right notes?
In money matters, I think.
Except perhaps, Polemarchus, in using money, for whenever one needs to buy a horse jointly, I think a horse breeder is a more useful partner, isn't he?

Apparently.
And when one needs to buy a boat, it's a boatbuilder or a ship's captain?
Probably.
In what joint use of silver or gold, then, is a just person a more useful partner than the others?
When it must be deposited for safekeeping, Socrates.
You mean whenever there is no need to use them but only to keep them?
That's right.
Then it is when money isn't being used that justice is useful for it?
I'm afraid so.
And whenever one needs to keep a pruning knife safe, but not to use it, justice is useful both in partnerships and for the individual. When you need to use it, however, it is skill at vine pruning that's useful?

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Apparently.
You'll agree, then, that when one needs to keep a shield or a lyre safe and not to use them, justice is a useful thing, but when you need to use them, it is soldiery or musicianship that's useful?
Necessarily.
And so, too, with everything else, justice is useless when they are in use but useful when they aren't?
It looks that way.

In that case, justice isn't worth much, since it is only useful for useless things. But let's look into the following point. Isn't the person most able to land a blow, whether in boxing or any other kind of fight, also most able to guard against it?
Certainly.
And the one who is most able to guard against disease is also most able to produce it unnoticed?
So it seems to me, anyway.
And the one who is the best guardian of an army is the very one who can steal the enemy's plans and dispositions?

Certainly.
Whenever someone is a clever guardian, then, he is also a clever thief.
Probably so.
If a just person is clever at guarding money, therefore, he must also be clever at stealing it.
According to our argument, at any rate.
A just person has turned out then, it seems, to be a kind of thief. Maybe you learned this from Homer, for he's fond of Autolycus, the maternal grandfather of Odysseus, whom he describes as better than everyone at lying and stealing. According to you, Homer, and Simonides, then, justice seems to be some sort of craft of stealing, one that benefits friends and harms enemies. Isn't that what you meant?

No, by god, it isn't. I don't know any more what I did mean, but I still believe that to benefit one's friends and harm one's enemies is justice.
Speaking of friends, do you mean those a person believes to be good and useful to him or those who actually are good and useful, even if he doesn't think they are, and similarly with enemies?

Probably, one loves those one considers good and useful and hates those one considers bad and harmful.
But surely people often make mistakes about this, believing many people to be good and useful when they aren't, and making the opposite mistake about enemies?
They do indeed.

11. The reference is to Odyssey 19.392–8.
And then good people are their enemies and bad ones their friends?
That's right.
And so it's just to benefit bad people and harm good ones?
Apparently.
But good people are just and able to do no wrong?
True.
Then, according to your account, it's just to do bad things to those who do no injustice.
No, that's not just at all, Socrates; my account must be a bad one.
It's just, then, is it, to harm unjust people and benefit just ones?
That's obviously a more attractive view than the other one, anyway.
Then, it follows, Polemarchus, that it is just for the many, who are mistaken in their judgment, to harm their friends, who are bad, and benefit their enemies, who are good. And so we arrive at a conclusion opposite to what we said Simonides meant.
That certainly follows. But let's change our definition, for it seems that we didn't define friends and enemies correctly.
How did we define them, Polemarchus?
We said that a friend is someone who is believed to be useful.
And how are we to change that now?
Someone who is both believed to be useful and is useful is a friend; someone who is believed to be useful but isn't, is believed to be a friend but isn't. And the same for the enemy.
According to this account, then, a good person will be a friend and a bad one an enemy.
Yes.
So you want us to add something to what we said before about justice, when we said that it is just to treat friends well and enemies badly. You want us to add to this that it is just to treat well a friend who is good and to harm an enemy who is bad?
Right. That seems fine to me.
Is it, then, the role of a just man to harm anyone?
Certainly, he must harm those who are both bad and enemies.
Do horses become better or worse when they are harmed?
Worse.
With respect to the virtue that makes dogs good or the one that makes horses good?
12. If something is a knife (say) or a man, its areté or virtue as a knife or a man is that state or property of it that makes it a good knife or a good man. See Charmides 161a8–9; Euthyphro 6d9–e1; Gorgias 506d2–4; Protagoras 332b4–6; Republic 353d9–354a2. The areté of a knife might include having a sharp blade; the areté of a man might include being intelligent, well-born, just, or courageous. Areté is thus broader than our notion of moral virtue. It applies to things (such as knives) which are not moral agents. And it applies to aspects of moral agents (such as intelligence or family status) which are not normally considered to be moral aspects of them. For these reasons it is sometimes more appropriate to render areté as "excellence." But "virtue" remains the best overall translation, and once these few facts are borne in mind, it should seldom mislead.

Simonides, Bias, Pittacus, or any of our other wise and blessedly happy men said this.  

I, at any rate, am willing to be your partner in the battle.

Do you know to whom I think the saying belongs that it is just to benefit friends and harm enemies?

Who?

I think it belongs to Periander, or Perdiccas, or Xerxes, or Ismenias of Corinth, or some other wealthy man who believed himself to have great power.

That’s absolutely true.

All right, since it has become apparent that justice and the just aren’t what such people say they are, what else could they be?

While we were speaking, Thrasymachus had tried many times to take over the discussion but was restrained by those sitting near him, who wanted to hear our argument to the end. When we paused after what I’d just said, however, he couldn’t keep quiet any longer. He coiled himself up like a wild beast about to spring, and he hurled himself at us as if to tear us to pieces.

Polemarchus and I were frightened and flustered as he roared into our midst: What nonsense have you two been talking, Socrates? Why do you act like idiots by giving way to one another? If you truly want to know what justice is, don’t just ask questions and then refute the answers simply to satisfy your competitiveness or love of honor. You know very well that it is easier to ask questions than answer them. Give an answer yourself, and tell us what you say the just is. And don’t tell me that it’s the right, the beneficial, the profitable, the gainful, or the advantageous, but tell me clearly and exactly what you mean; for I won’t accept such nonsense from you.

His words startled me, and, looking at him, I was afraid. And I think that if I hadn’t seen him before he stared at me, I’d have been dumbstruck. But as it was, I happened to look at him just as our discussion began to exasperate him, so I was able to answer, and, trembling a little, I said: Don’t be too hard on us, Thrasymachus, for if Polemarchus and I made an error in our investigation, you should know that we did so unwillingly.

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13. Bias of Priene in Ionia (now the region of Turkey bordering on the eastern shore of the Aegean) and Pittacus of Mytilene (on the island of Lesbos in the eastern Aegean), both sixth century B.C., were two of the legendary seven sages of Greece.

14. Periander was tyrant of the city of Corinth (650–570 B.C.). Perdiccas is probably Perdiccas II, King of Macedon (c. 450–413 B.C.), who is also mentioned in the Gorgias 471a–c. Xerxes was the king of Persia who invaded Greece in the second Persian war (begun in 480 B.C.). Ismenias is mentioned in the Memo 90a. All four are either notorious tyrants or men famous for their wealth.

If we were searching for gold, we’d never willingly give way to each other, if by doing so we’d destroy our chance of finding it. So don’t think that in searching for justice, a thing more valuable than even a large quantity of gold, we’d mindlessly give way to one another or be less than completely serious about finding it. You surely mustn’t think that, but rather—as I do—that we’re incapable of finding it. Hence it’s surely far more appropriate for us to be pitted by you clever people than to be given rough treatment.

When he heard that, he gave a loud, sarcastic laugh. By Heracles, he said, that’s just Socrates’ usual irony.  

15. The Greek word eirôneia, unlike its usual translation “irony,” is correctly applied only to someone who intends to deceive. Thus Thrasymachus is not simply accusing Socrates of saying one thing while meaning another; he is accusing him of trying to deceive those present. See G. Vlastos, “Socratic Irony,” Classical Quarterly 37 (1987): 79–96.
I will as soon as I have some money.

He has some already, said Glaucon. If it's a matter of money, speak, Thrasymachus, for we'll all contribute for Socrates.

I know, he said, so that Socrates can carry on as usual. He gives no answer himself, and then, when someone else does give one, he takes up the argument and refutes it.

How can someone give an answer, I said, when he doesn't know it and doesn't claim to know it, and when an eminent man forbids him to express the opinion he has? It's much more appropriate for you to answer, since you say you know and can tell us. So do it as a favor to me, and don't begrudge your teaching to Glaucon and the others.

While I was saying this, Glaucon and the others begged him to speak. It was obvious that Thrasymachus thought he had a fine answer and that he wanted to earn their admiration by giving it, but he pretended that he wanted to indulge his love of victory by forcing me to answer. However, he agreed in the end, and then said: There you have Socrates' wisdom; he himself isn't willing to teach, but he goes around learning from others and isn't even grateful to them.

When you say that I learn from others you are right, Thrasymachus, but when you say that I'm not grateful, that isn't true. I show what gratitude I can, but since I have no money, I can give only praise. But just how enthusiastically I give it when someone seems to me to speak well, you'll know as soon as you've answered, for I think that you will speak well.

Listen, then. I say that justice is nothing other than the advantage of the stronger. Well, why don’t you praise me? But then you'd do anything to avoid having to do that.

I must first understand you, for I don't yet know what you mean. The advantage of the stronger, you say, is just. What do you mean, Thrasymachus? Surely you don’t mean something like this: Polydamus, the pancratist, is stronger than we are; it is to his advantage to eat beef to build up his physical strength; therefore, this food is also advantageous and just for us who are weaker than he is?

You disgust me, Socrates. Your trick is to take hold of the argument at the point where you can do it the most harm.

Not at all, but tell us more clearly what you mean.

Don't you know that some cities are ruled by a tyranny, some by a democracy, and some by an aristocracy?

Of course.

16. Pancration was a mixture of boxing and wrestling combined with kicking and strangling. Biting and gouging were forbidden, but pretty well everything else, including breaking and dislocating limbs, was permitted.
I think so.

Then you must also think that you have agreed that it is just to do what is disadvantageous to the rulers and those who are stronger, whenever they unintentionally order what is bad for themselves. But you also say that it is just for the others to obey the orders they give. You're terribly clever, Thrasymachus, but doesn't it necessarily follow that it is just to do the opposite of what you said, since the weaker are then ordered to do what is disadvantageous to the stronger?

By god, Socrates, said Polemarchus, that's quite clear.

If you are to be his witness anyway, said Cleitophon, interrupting.

Who needs a witness? Polemarchus replied. Thrasymachus himself agrees that the rulers sometimes order what is bad for themselves and that it is just for the others to do it.

That, Polemarchus, is because Thrasymachus maintained that it is just to obey the orders of the rulers.

He also maintained, Cleitophon, that the advantage of the stronger is just. And having maintained both principles he went on to agree that the stronger sometimes gives orders to those who are weaker than he is—in other words, to his subjects—that are disadvantageous to the stronger himself. From these agreements it follows that what is to the advantage of the stronger is no more just than what is not to his advantage.

But, Cleitophon responded, he said that the advantage of the stronger is what the stronger believes to be his advantage. This is what the weaker must do, and this is what he maintained the just to be.

That isn't what he said, Polemarchus replied.

It makes no difference, Polemarchus, I said. If Thrasymachus wants to put it that way now, let's accept it. Tell me, Thrasymachus, is this what you wanted to say the just is, namely, what the stronger believes to be to his advantage, whether it is in fact to his advantage or not? Is that what we are to say you mean?

Not at all. Do you think I'd call someone who is in error stronger at the very moment he errs?

I did think that was what you meant when you agreed that the rulers aren't infallible but are liable to error.

That's because you are a false witness in arguments, Socrates. When someone makes an error in the treatment of patients, do you call him a doctor in regard to that very error? Or when someone makes an error in accounting, do you call him an accountant in regard to that very error in calculation? I think that we express ourselves in words that, taken literally, do say that a doctor is in error, or an accountant, or a grammarian. But each of these, insofar as he is what we call him, never errs, so that, according to the precise account (and you are a stickler for precise ac-

All right, Thrasymachus, so you think I'm a false witness?

You certainly are.

And you think that I asked the questions I did in order to harm you in the argument?

I know it very well, but it won't do you any good. You'll never be able to trick me, so you can't harm me that way, and without trickery you'll never be able to overpower me in argument.

I wouldn't so much as try, Thrasymachus. But in order to prevent this sort of thing from happening again, define clearly whether it is the ruler and stronger in the ordinary sense or in the precise sense whose advantage you said it is just for the weaker to promote as the advantage of the stronger.

I mean the ruler in the most precise sense. Now practice your harm-doing and false witnessing on that if you can—I ask no concessions from you—but you certainly won't be able to.

Do you think that I'm crazy enough to try to shave a lion or to bear false witness against Thrasymachus?

You certainly tried just now, though you were a loser at that too.

Enough of this. Tell me: Is a doctor in the precise sense, whom you mentioned before, a money-maker or someone who treats the sick? Tell me about the one who is really a doctor.

He's the one who treats the sick.

What about a ship's captain? Is a captain in the precise sense a ruler of sailors or a sailor?

A ruler of sailors.

We shouldn't, I think, take into account the fact that he sails in a ship, and he shouldn't be called a sailor for that reason, for it isn't because of his sailing that he is called a ship's captain, but because of his craft and his rule over sailors?

That's true.

And is there something advantageous to each of these, that is, to bodies and to sailors?

Certainly.
And aren't the respective crafts by nature set over them to seek and provide what is to their advantage?

They are.

And is there any advantage for each of the crafts themselves except to be as complete or perfect as possible?

What are you asking?

This: If you asked me whether our bodies are sufficient in themselves, or whether they need something else, I'd answer: "They certainly have needs. And because of this, because our bodies are deficient rather than self-sufficient, the craft of medicine has now been discovered. The craft of medicine was developed to provide what is advantageous for a body." Do you think that I'm right in saying this or not?

You are right.

Now, is medicine deficient? Does a craft need some further virtue, as the eyes are in need of sight, and the ears of hearing, so that another craft is needed to seek and provide what is advantageous to them? Does a craft itself have some similar deficiency, so that each craft needs another, to seek out what is to its advantage? And does the craft that does the seeking need still another, and so on without end? Or does each seek out what is to its own advantage by itself? Or does it need neither itself nor another craft to seek out what is advantageous to it, because of its own deficiencies? Or is it that there is no deficiency or error in any craft? That it isn't appropriate for any craft to seek what is to the advantage of anything except that of which it is the craft? And that, since it is itself correct, it is without either fault or impurity, as long as it is wholly and precisely the craft that it is? Consider this with the preciseness of language you mentioned. Is it so or not?

It appears to be so.

Medicine doesn't seek its own advantage, then, but that of the body?

Yes.

And horse-breeding doesn't seek its own advantage, but that of horses? Indeed, no other craft seeks its own advantage—for it has no further needs—but the advantage of that of which it is the craft?

Apparently so.

Now, surely, Thrasy machus, the crafts rule over and are stronger than the things of which they are the crafts?

Very reluctantly, he conceded this as well.

17. Sight is the virtue or excellence of the eyes (see 335b n. 12). Without it, the eyes cannot achieve what is advantageous to them, namely, sight. So eyes need some further virtue to seek and provide what is advantageous to them. But Socrates assumes throughout Book I that virtues are crafts (see 332d). Hence he can conclude that the eyes need a further craft to achieve what is advantageous to them.

No kind of knowledge seeks or orders what is advantageous to itself, then, but what is advantageous to the weaker, which is subject to it.

He tried to fight this conclusion, but he conceded it in the end. And after he had, I said: Surely, then, no doctor, insofar as he is a doctor, seeks or orders what is advantageous to himself, but what is advantageous to his patient? We agreed that a doctor in the precise sense is a ruler of bodies, not a money-maker. Wasn't that agreed?

Yes.

So a ship's captain in the precise sense is a ruler of sailors, not a sailor?

That's what we agreed.

Doesn't it follow that a ship's captain or ruler won't seek and order what is advantageous to himself, but what is advantageous to a sailor?

He reluctantly agreed.

So, then, Thrasy machus, no one in any position of rule, insofar as he is a ruler, seeks or orders what is advantageous to himself, but what is advantageous to his subjects; the ones of whom he is himself the craftsman. It is to his subjects and what is advantageous and proper to them that he looks, and everything he says and does he says and does for them.

When we reached this point in the argument, and it was clear to all that his account of justice had turned into its opposite, instead of answering, Thrasy machus said: Tell me, Socrates, do you still have a wet nurse?

What's this? Hadn't you better answer my questions rather than asking me such things?

Because she's letting you run around with a snotty nose, and doesn't wipe it when she needs to! Why, for all she cares, you don't even know about sheep and shepherds.

Just what is it I don't know?

You think that shepherds and cowherds seek the good of their sheep and cattle, and fatten them and take care of them, looking to something other than their master's good and their own. Moreover, you believe that rulers in cities—true rulers, that is—think about their subjects differently than one does about sheep, and that night and day they think of something besides their own advantage. You are so far from understanding about justice and what's just, about injustice and what's unjust, that you don't realize that justice is really the good of another, the advantage of the stronger and the ruler, and harmful to the one who obeys and serves. Injustice is the opposite, it rules the truly simple and just, and those it rules do what is to the advantage of the other and stronger, and they make the one they serve happy, but themselves not at all. You must look at it as follows, my most simple Socrates: A just man always gets less than an unjust one. First, in their contracts with one another, you'll never find, when the partnership ends, that a just partner has got more than an unjust
one, but less. Second, in matters relating to the city, when taxes are to be
paid, a just man pays more on the same property, an unjust one less, but
when the city is giving out refunds, a just man gets nothing, while an
unjust one makes a large profit. Finally, when each of them holds a ruling
position in some public office, a just person, even if he isn't penalized in
other ways, finds that his private affairs deteriorate because he has to
neglect them, that he gains no advantage from the public purse because
of his justice, and that he's hated by his relatives and acquaintances when
he's unwilling to do them an unjust favor. The opposite is true of an unjust
man in every respect. Therefore, I repeat what I said before: A person of
great power outdoes everyone else. 18 Consider him if you want to figure
out how much more advantageous it is for the individual to be just rather
than unjust. You'll understand this most easily if you turn your thoughts
to the most complete injustice, the one that makes the doer of injustice
happiest and the sufferers of it, who are unwilling to do injustice, most
wretched. This is tyranny, which through stealth or force appropriates the
property of others, whether sacred or profane, public or private, not little
by little, but all at once. If someone commits only one part of injustice
and is caught, he's punished and greatly reproached—such partly unjust
people are called temple-robbers, 19 kidnappers, housebreakers, robbers,
and thieves when they commit these crimes. But when someone, in addition
to appropriating their possessions, kidnaps and enslaves the citizens
as well, instead of these shameful names he is called happy and blessed,
not only by the citizens themselves, but by all who learn that he has done
the whole of injustice. Those who reproach injustice do so because they
are afraid not of doing it but of suffering it. So, Socrates, injustice, if it is
on a large enough scale, is stronger, freer, and more masterly than justice.
And, as I said from the first, justice is what is advantageous to the stronger,
while injustice is to one's own profit and advantage.

Having emptied this great flood of words into our ears all at once like
a bath attendant, Thrasymachus intended to leave. But those present
didn't let him and made him stay to give an account of what he had said.
I too begged him to stay, and I said to him: After hurling such a speech
didn't let him and made him stay to give an account of what he had said.

18. Outdoing (pleonekttein) is an important notion in the remainder of the Republic. It
is connected to pleonexia, which is what one succumbs to when one always wants to
outdo everyone else by getting and having more and more. Pleonexia is, or is the cause
of, injustice (359e), since always wanting to outdo others leads one to try to get what
belongs to them, what isn't one's own. It is contrasted with doing or having one's own,
which is, or is the cause of, justice (434a, 441e).

19. The temples acted as public treasuries, so that a temple robber is the equivalent
of a present-day bank robber.
don’t answer contrary to what you believe, so that we can come to some
definite conclusion.
Yes, that’s what differentiates them.
And each craft benefits us in its own peculiar way, different from the
others. For example, medicine gives us health, navigation gives us safety
while sailing, and so on with the others?
Certainly.
And wage-earning gives us wages, for this is its function? Or would you
call medicine the same as navigation? Indeed, if you want to define matters
precisely, as you proposed, even if someone who is a ship’s captain be­
comes healthy because sailing is advantageous to his health, you wouldn’t
for that reason call his craft medicine?
Certainly not.
Nor would you call wage-earning medicine, even if someone becomes
healthy while earning wages?
Certainly not.
Nor would you call medicine wage-earning, even if someone earns pay
while healing?
No.
We are agreed, then, that each craft brings its own peculiar benefit?
It does.
Then whatever benefit all craftsmen receive in common must clearly
result from their joint practice of some additional craft that benefits each
of them?
So it seems.
And we say that the additional craft in question, which benefits the
craftsmen by earning them wages, is the craft of wage-earning?
He reluctantly agreed.
Then this benefit, receiving wages, doesn’t result from their own craft,
but rather, if we’re to examine this precisely, medicine provides health,
and wage-earning provides wages; house-building provides a house, and
wage-earning, which accompanies it, provides a wage; and so on with the
other crafts. Each of them does its own work and benefits the things it is
set over. So, if wages aren’t added, is there any benefit that the craftsman
gets from his craft?
Apparently none.
But he still provides a benefit when he works for nothing?
Yes, I think he does.
Then, it is clear now, Thrasymachus, that no craft or rule provides for
its own advantage, but, as we’ve been saying for some time, it provides
and orders for its subject and aims at its advantage, that of the weaker,
not of the stronger. That’s why I said just now, Thrasymachus, that no
one willingly chooses to rule and to take other people’s troubles in hand
and straighten them out, but each asks for wages; for anyone who intends
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to practice his craft well never does or orders what is best for himself—
at least not when he orders as his craft prescribes—but what is best for
his subject. It is because of this, it seems, that wages must be provided to
a person if he’s to be willing to rule, whether in the form of money or
honor or a penalty if he refuses.
What do you mean, Socrates? said Glaucon. I know the first two kinds
of wages, but I don’t understand what penalty you mean or how you can
call it a wage.
Then you don’t understand the best people’s kind of wages, the kind
that moves the most decent to rule, when they are willing to rule at all.
Don’t you know that the love of honor and the love of money are despised,
and rightly so?
I do.
Therefore good people won’t be willing to rule for the sake of either
money or honor. They don’t want to be paid wages openly for ruling and
get called hired hands, nor to take them in secret from their rule and be
called thieves. And they won’t rule for the sake of honor, because they
aren’t ambitious honor-lovers. So, if they’re to be willing to rule, some
compulsion or punishment must be brought to bear on them—perhaps
that’s why it is thought shameful to seek to rule before one is compelled
to. Now, the greatest punishment, if one isn’t willing to rule, is to be ruled
by someone worse than oneself. And I think that it’s fear of this that makes
decent people rule when they do. They approach ruling not as something
good or something to be enjoyed, but as something necessary, since it
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can’t be entrusted to anyone better than—or even as good as—theirselves.
In a city of good men, if it came into being, the citizens would fight in
order not to rule, just as they do now in order to rule. There it would be
quite clear that anyone who is really a true ruler doesn’t by nature seek
his own advantage but that of his subjects. And everyone, knowing this,
would rather be benefited by others than take the trouble to benefit them.
So I can’t at all agree with Thrasymachus that justice is the advantage
of the stronger—but we’ll look further into that another time. What
Thrasymachus is now saying—that the life of an unjust person is better
than that of a just one—seems to be of far greater importance. Which life
would you choose, Glaucon? And which of our views do you consider
truer?
I certainly think that the life of a just person is more profitable.
Did you hear all of the good things Thrasymachus listed a moment ago
for the unjust life?
I heard, but I wasn’t persuaded.
Then, do you want us to persuade him, if we’re able to find a way, that what he says isn’t true?

Of course I do.

If we oppose him with a parallel speech about the blessings of the just life, and then he replies, and then we do, we’d have to count and measure the good things mentioned on each side, and we’d need a jury to decide the case. But if, on the other hand, we investigate the question, as we’ve been doing, by seeking agreement with each other, we ourselves can be both jury and advocates at once.

Certainly.

Which approach do you prefer? I asked.

The second.

Come, then, Thrasymachus, I said, answer us from the beginning. You say that complete injustice is more profitable than complete justice?

I certainly do say that, and I’ve told you why.

Well, then, what do you say about this? Do you call one of the two a virtue and the other a vice?

Of course.

That is to say, you call justice a virtue and injustice a vice?

That’s hardly likely, since I say that injustice is profitable and justice isn’t.

Then, what exactly do you say?

The opposite.

That justice is a vice?

No, just very high-minded simplicity.

Then do you call being unjust being low-minded?

No, I call it good judgment.

You consider unjust people, then, Thrasymachus, to be clever and good?

Yes, those who are completely unjust, who can bring cities and whole communities under their power. Perhaps, you think I meant pickpockets? Not that such crimes aren’t also profitable, if they’re not found out, but they aren’t worth mentioning by comparison to what I’m talking about.

I’m not unaware of what you want to say. But I wonder about this: Do you really include injustice with virtue and wisdom, and justice with their opposites?

I certainly do.

That’s harder, and it isn’t easy now to know what to say. If you had declared that injustice is more profitable, but agreed that it is a vice or shameful, as some others do, we could have discussed the matter on the basis of conventional beliefs. But now, obviously, you’ll say that injustice is fine and strong and apply to it all the attributes we used to apply to justice, since you dare to include it with virtue and wisdom.

You’ve divined my views exactly.

Nonetheless, we mustn’t shrink from pursuing the argument and looking into this, just as long as I take you to be saying what you really think. And I believe that you aren’t joking now, Thrasymachus, but are saying what you believe to be the truth.

What difference does it make to you, whether I believe it or not? It’s my account you’re supposed to be refuting.

It makes no difference. But try to answer this further question: Do you think that a just person wants to outdo someone else who’s just?

Not at all, for he wouldn’t then be as polite and innocent as he is.

Or to outdo someone who does a just action?

No, he doesn’t even want to do that.

And does he claim that he deserves to outdo an unjust person and believe that it is just for him to do so, or doesn’t he believe that?

He’d want to outdo him, and he’d claim to deserve to do so, but he wouldn’t be able.

That’s not what I asked, but whether a just person wants to outdo an unjust person but not a just one, thinking that this is what he deserves?

He does.

What about an unjust person? Does he claim that he deserves to outdo a just person or someone who does a just action?

Of course he does; he thinks he deserves to outdo everyone.

Then will an unjust person also outdo an unjust person or someone who does an unjust action, and will he strive to get the most he can for himself from everyone?

He will.

Then, let’s put it this way: A just person doesn’t outdo someone like himself but someone unlike himself, whereas an unjust person outdoes both like and unlike.

Very well put.

An unjust person is clever and good, and a just one is neither? That’s well put, too.

It follows, then, that an unjust person is like clever and good people, while the other isn’t?

Of course that’s so. How could he fail to be like them when he has their qualities, while the other isn’t like them?

Fine. Then each of them has the qualities of the people he’s like?

Of course.

All right, Thrasymachus. Do you call one person musical and another nonmusical?

I do.

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Which of them is clever in music, and which isn’t?
The musical one is clever, of course, and the other isn’t.
And the things he’s clever in, he’s good in, and the things he isn’t clever
in, he’s bad in?
Yes.
Isn’t the same true of a doctor?
It is.
Do you think that a musician, in tuning his lyre and in tightening and
loosening the strings, wants to outdo another musician, claiming that this
is what he deserves?22
I do not.
But he does want to outdo a nonmusician?
Necessarily.
What about a doctor? Does he, when prescribing food and drink, want
350 to outdo another doctor or someone who does the action that medicine
prescribes?
Certainly not.
But he does want to outdo a nondoctor?
Yes.
In any branch of knowledge or ignorance, do you think that a knowledge­
able person would intentionally try to outdo other knowledgeable people
or say something better or different than they do, rather than doing or
saying the very same thing as those like him?
Well, perhaps it must be as you say.
And what about an ignorant person? Doesn’t he want to outdo both a
knowledgeable person and an ignorant one?
Probably.
A knowledgeable person is clever?
I agree.
And a clever one is good?
I agree.
Therefore, a good and clever person doesn’t want to outdo those like
himself but those who are unlike him and his opposite.
So it seems.
But a bad and ignorant person wants to outdo both his like and his
opposite.

22. Socrates’ point may seem obscure, but what he has in mind is explained at 350a. All expert musicians try to get the same thing, perfect harmony, so they tighten and loosen their strings to exactly the same degree, namely, the one that will produce the right pitch. In the same way, all doctors who are masters of medicine prescribe the same diet for people with the same diseases, namely, the one that will best restore them to health.

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Appreciably.
Now, Thrasymachus, we found that an unjust person tries to outdo
those like him and those unlike him? Didn’t you say that?
I did.
And that a just person won’t outdo his like but his unlike?
Yes.
Then, a just person is like a clever and good one, and an unjust is like
an ignorant and bad one.
It looks that way.
Moreover, we agreed that each has the qualities of the one he resembles.
Yes, we did.
Then, a just person has turned out to be good and clever, and an unjust
one ignorant and bad.

Thrasymachus agreed to all this, not easily as I’m telling it, but reluct­
tantly, with toil, trouble, and—since it was summer—a quantity of sweat
that was a wonder to behold. And then I saw something I’d never seen
before—Thrasymachus blushing. But, in any case, after we’d agreed that
justice is virtue and wisdom and that injustice is vice and ignorance, I said:
All right, let’s take that as established. But we also said that injustice is
powerful, or don’t you remember that, Thrasymachus?
I remember, but I’m not satisfied with what you’re now saying. I could
make a speech about it, but, if I did, I know that you’d accuse me of
engaging in oratory. So either allow me to speak, or, if you want to ask
questions, go ahead, and I’ll say, “All right,” and nod yes and no, as one
does to old wives’ tales.
Don’t do that, contrary to your own opinion.
I’ll answer so as to please you, since you won’t let me make a speech.
What else do you want?
Nothing, by god. But if that’s what you’re going to do, go ahead and do
it. I’ll ask my questions.
Ask ahead.
I’ll ask what I asked before, so that we may proceed with our argument
about justice and injustice in an orderly fashion, for surely it was claimed
that injustice is stronger and more powerful than justice. But, now, if
justice is indeed wisdom and virtue, it will easily be shown to be stronger
than injustice, since injustice is ignorance (no one could now be ignorant
of that). However, I don’t want to state the matter so unconditionally,
Thrasymachus, but to look into it in some such way as this. Would you
say that it is unjust for a city to try to enslave other cities unjustly and to
hold them in subjection when it has enslaved many of them?
Of course, that’s what the best city will especially do, the one that is
most completely unjust.
I understand that’s your position, but the point I want to examine is this: Will the city that becomes stronger than another achieve this power without justice, or will it need the help of justice? If what you said a moment ago stands, and justice is cleverness or wisdom, it will need the help of justice, but if things are as I stated, it will need the help of injustice.

I’m impressed, Thrasy machus, that you don’t merely nod yes or no but give very fine answers. That’s because I’m trying to please you. You’re doing well at it, too. So please me some more by answering this question: Do you think that a city, an army, a band of robbers or thieves, or any other tribe with a common unjust purpose would be able to achieve it if they were unjust to each other?

No, indeed. What if they weren’t unjust to one another? Would they achieve more? Certainly. Injustice, Thrasy machus, causes civil war, hatred, and fighting among themselves, while justice brings friendship and a sense of common purpose. Isn’t that so?

Let it be so, in order not to disagree with you. You’re still doing well on that front. So tell me this: If the effect of injustice is to produce hatred wherever it occurs, then, whenever it arises, whether among free men or slaves, won’t it cause them to hate one another, engage in civil war, and prevent them from achieving any common purpose?

Certainly.

What if it arises between two people? Won’t they be at odds, hate each other, and be enemies to one another and to just people?

They will.

Does injustice lose its power to cause dissension when it arises within a single individual, or will it preserve it intact?

Let it preserve it intact.

Apparently, then, injustice has the power, first, to make whatever it arises in—whether it is a city, a family, an army, or anything else—incapable of achieving anything as a unit, because of the civil wars and differences it creates, and, second, it makes that unit an enemy to itself and to what is in every way its opposite, namely, justice. Isn’t that so?

Certainly.

And even in a single individual, it has by its nature the very same effect. First, it makes him incapable of achieving anything, because he is in a state of civil war and not of one mind; second, it makes him his own enemy, as well as the enemy of just people. Hasn’t it that effect?
What about this? Could you use a dagger or a carving knife or lots of other things in pruning a vine?

Of course.

But wouldn't you do a finer job with a pruning knife designed for the purpose than with anything else?

You would.

Then shall we take pruning to be its function?

Yes.

Now, I think you'll understand what I was asking earlier when I asked whether the function of each thing is what it alone can do or what it does better than anything else.

I understand, and I think that this is the function of each.

All right. Does each thing to which a particular function is assigned also have a virtue? Let's go over the same ground again. We say that eyes have some function?

Yes.

So there is also a virtue of eyes?

There is.

And ears have a function?

Yes.

So there is also a virtue of ears?

There is.

And all other things are the same, aren't they?

They are.

And could eyes perform their function well if they lacked their peculiar virtue and had the vice instead?

How could they, for don't you mean if they had blindness instead of sight?

Whatever their virtue is, for I'm not now asking about that but about whether anything that has a function performs it well by means of its own peculiar virtue and badly by means of its vice?

That's true, it does.

So ears, too, deprived of their own virtue, perform their function badly?

That's right.

And the same could be said about everything else?

So it seems.

Come, then, and let's consider this: Is there some function of a soul that you couldn't perform with anything else, for example, taking care of things, ruling, deliberating, and the like? Is there anything other than a soul to which you could rightly assign these, and say that they are its peculiar function?

No, none of them.

What of living? Isn't that a function of a soul?

It certainly is.

And don't we also say that there is a virtue of a soul?

We do.

Then, will a soul ever perform its function well, Thrasymachus, if it is deprived of its own peculiar virtue, or is that impossible?

It's impossible.

Doesn't it follow, then, that a bad soul rules and takes care of things badly and that a good soul does all these things well?

It does.

Now, we agreed that justice is a soul's virtue, and injustice its vice?

We did.

Then, it follows that a just soul and a just man will live well, and an unjust one badly.

Apparently so, according to your argument.

And surely anyone who lives well is blessed and happy, and anyone who doesn't is the opposite.

Of course.

Therefore, a just person is happy, and an unjust one wretched.

So be it.

It profits no one to be wretched but to be happy.

Of course.

And so, Thrasymachus, injustice is never more profitable than justice.

Let that be your banquet, Socrates, at the feast of Bendis.

Given by you, Thrasymachus, after you became gentle and ceased to give me rough treatment. Yet I haven't had a fine banquet. But that's my fault not yours. I seem to have behaved like a glutton, snatching at every dish that passes and tasting it before properly savoring its predecessor.

Before finding the answer to our first inquiry about what justice is, I let that go and turned to investigate whether it is a kind of vice and ignorance or a kind of wisdom and virtue. Then an argument came up about injustice being more profitable than justice, and I couldn't refrain from abandoning the previous one and following up on that. Hence the result of the discussion, as far as I'm concerned, is that I know nothing, for when I don't know what justice is, I'll hardly know whether it is a kind of virtue or not, or whether a person who has it is happy or unhappy.

24. See 335b n. 12.