

Plato's Republic, Book I

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Yesterday I went down to the Piraeus with Glaucon, son of Ariston, to offer up my prayers to the goddess; also to see how they would celebrate the festival, which was a new thing. I was delighted with the procession the inhabitants put on; but the Thracians' was just as beautiful, maybe more so. When we had finished our prayers and watched the spectacle, we headed back towards the city. Just then Polemarchus, son of Cephalus, happened to catch sight of us from a distance as we were starting home and told his servant to run ahead and tell us to wait. The servant grabbed me from behind by the cloak, and said, 'Polemarchus says to wait.'

I turned around and asked him where his master was.

There he is, coming after you, so wait, said the boy.

Of course we will, said Glaucon; and in a few minutes Polemarchus caught up. With him were Adeimantus, Glaucon's brother, Niceratus the son of Nicias, and several others who had been at the procession.

Polemarchus said to me: Socrates, I see you and our friend here are already headed back to the city.

You've guessed right, I said.

But don't you see how many of us there are, he replied?

Of course.

Either you must overpower all of us, or you will have to stay where you are.

Isn't there another way, I said; namely, that we could persuade you to let us go?

But can you persuade us if we won't listen? he said.

Certainly not, replied Glaucon.

Then we aren't going to listen; you can count on it.

Adeimantus added: haven't you heard about the horseback torch-race in honour of the goddess? It's going to be tonight.

Horses! I replied: That's something new. Do you mean the riders will carry torches and pass them, like batons, during the race?

Yes, said Polemarchus. Not only that, but a festival will be celebrated at night, which is worth seeing. Let's go right after dinner and see it; there will be a lot of young men, and we will have pleasant conversations. So stay; don't spoil the fun by leaving.

Glaucon said: it looks like we have to stay.

Then that's the way it has to be, I replied.

So we went with Polemarchus to his house; and there we found his brothers Lysias and Euthydemus, and with them Thrasymachus the Chalcedonian, Charmantides the Paenian, and Cleitophon, son of Aristonymus. Polemarchus' father, Cephalus, was there too. I had not seen him for a long time and thought he looked very old. He was sitting on a cushioned chair, with a garland on his head, since he had made sacrifice that day in the courtyard. We sat down by him in chairs arranged in a circle. He greeted me eagerly, and then said:

You don't visit me as often as you should, Socrates. If I were still able to visit you, I would not have to ask you to come here. But as I can't, you should come down to the Piraeus more often. For I have to tell you that the more the pleasures of the body fade, the more the pleasure and charm of conversation increase. Do as I say then, and make our house your home and keep company with these young men; we are old friends, and you will fit right in here.

I replied: I like nothing better than conversation with my elders, Cephalus; I think of them as travellers who have taken a journey I may have to make myself; so I ought to find out from them whether the road is rugged and difficult, or smooth and easy. So this is the question I would like to put to you, who have arrived at that stage in life the poets call the "threshold of old age" – Is life harder towards the end? What can you tell us about it all?

I will tell you, by Zeus, he said, that my own feeling, Socrates, is this. Men my age flock together; we are birds of a feather, as the proverb says; and at our meetings most of my friends weep and moan – they long for the pleasures of youth, and reminisce about sex and drinking and feasting and everything else like that. They feel annoyed, as if they have been robbed of something great, and say, 'life used to be good; now it's not worth living.' Some complain about old people being disrespected in their own households; they sing a sad song blaming age for being the cause of all their woes. But to me, Socrates, these whiners put the blame in the wrong place. If old age really caused all these evils, I – and every single other old man, for that matter – would feel the way they do. But I don't, and neither do others I have known. I particularly remember what the poet Sophocles said, when he was old and someone asked, 'How's your sex life, Sophocles – can you still make love to a woman?' 'Be quiet,' he replied; 'I'm glad to be done with all that; I'm like a slave who has escaped from a crazy, brutal master.' I thought he was right then, and I still think so today. Because old age certainly does bring with it a sense of tranquility and freedom; when passion weakens its hold on us, then, just as Sophocles says, we escape the clutches, not

just of one crazy master but of a whole gang of them. The truth is, Socrates, all these pinings for lost youth, all these complaints about unhappy family life, are due to one cause – not old age, but man’s character. If a man is calm and happy, he won’t mind the weight of old age on his shoulders; if he isn’t, Socrates, both age and youth will be alike unbearable.

I admired him for saying all this, and, wanting to hear more I tried to get a rise out of him.

Yes, Cephalus, I said; but I think most people wouldn’t buy it, coming from you; they would say you bear your old age well not because of your disposition but because of your money. For, so they say, ‘being rich has many consolations.’

You’re right, he replied; that’s just what they would say: and there is something to it; but not as much as you might think. I could answer back the same way Themistocles answered that Seriphian who insulted him, saying he was only famous because he was Athenian, not because he deserved it. To that he said: ‘It’s true; I wouldn’t have made it to the top from Seriphos; but you wouldn’t have gotten anywhere even if you started in Athens.’ The same applies to those who are poor and miserable in old age. A man of good character won’t find it easy to be both old and poor; but a man of bad character isn’t going to be made happy by any amount of money.

Can I ask you, Cephalus, whether you made your fortune or inherited it?

Made it! Socrates; do you want to know how much I’m a self-made man? When it comes to money matters, I’m halfway between my father and grandfather: my grandfather, after whom I’m named, doubled and tripled what he inherited, which was about as much as I have; my father Lysanias spent a lot of it. So I’ll be happy to leave to my sons no less – in fact, a bit more – than I started out with myself.

That’s why I asked, I replied, because I see you don’t seem obsessed with money, which is generally true of those who inherit it. Those who make their own fortunes love them twice over – first, like everyone else, for the sake of what money can buy; second, as creations – just as poets love their poems, and parents their children. So self-made men are boring company; they can’t bring themselves to talk about anything but how great money is.

That’s true, he said.

Yes, it’s true, but may I ask another question? – What do you consider to be the greatest good you have reaped from being wealthy?

Something precious I don’t expect many people could be persuaded to believe in, he replied. But let me tell you, Socrates, that when a man thinks he is near death, he starts to care about things, be afraid of things – things he never gave a thought to before. All those stories about Hades he used to laugh at, about how the dead are made to pay for all the wrongs they committed in life – they don’t seem so

funny anymore. Now a man is tormented by the thought that maybe it's all true. Maybe this is because he's getting old and feeble; maybe it's because he is getting closer and closer to the place he must go; whichever it is, he is overcome by doubts and fears and reckons up his account, counting all the wrongs he has ever done to anyone. The man who finds he has committed many unjust deeds in life often wakes from his sleep with a frightened start, as children do. He lives in expectation of evil. But the man who finds he has a clean conscience, sweet good hope is constantly beside him – a nurse in his old age, as Pindar says. For he put this thought very charmingly, Socrates, that whoever lives his life justly and righteously,

Sweet hope
Who guides men's wandering purpose,
Walks at his side, gladdens his heart,
And comforts his old age.

These are wonderfully fine words! They tell us, I think, the value of wealth, not to every man but to a decent and orderly one. Wealth goes a long way towards preserving a man from having to lie or defraud anyone. When such a man departs to the world below his money has bought him peace of mind from cares about sacrifices owed to the gods or debts owed to men. And so on balance – weighing all the many benefits wealth may bring – I would say this is the greatest, to anyone with the intelligence to see it is so.

Well put, Cephalus, I replied; but concerning this thing you have been talking about – namely, justice – what is it? Just: speak truth and pay one's debts? Isn't there more to it? And isn't doing those things sometimes just, and at other times unjust? Suppose, for example, I have a friend who leaves weapons in my car, when he is of sound mind, and then asks for them back after he has gone insane. Should I give this madman his weapons? No one would say that was the right thing to do, or that someone who did give them back was a just man, any than they would say you should always speak the truth to someone in such a seriously disturbed frame of mind.

You're absolutely right, he replied.

But then, I said, 'speaking truth and paying one's debts' is not a correct definition of justice.

To the contrary, Socrates – interrupted Polemarchus – this is the exactly correct definition, if Simonides is to be believed.

I'm afraid I must go now, said Cephalus. I have to look after the sacrifices. I hand over the argument to you all.

Polemarchus is your heir, isn't he? I said.

Yes, indeed, he answered laughing, and went away to the sacrifices.

Tell me then, O noble heir to the argument: what it is that Simonides had to say about justice that you feel is correct?

He said that to give back what is owed to each person is just. I think he's right about that.

I wouldn't want to doubt the word of a wise and godlike man like Simonides, but his meaning – though maybe it's clear to you – is far from clear to me. To go back to what we were just saying, of course he doesn't mean that I should return weapons to a man who is out of his mind; and yet a thing held in trust is a sort of debt owed.

True.

But when the madman wants his weapons, I am not going to give them to him?

Certainly not.

When Simonides said justice was the repayment of what is owed, he meant something different from this sort of case?

Something very different, by Zeus; for he thinks that a friend ought to do good to a friend, never evil.

You mean, then, that to return a thing held in trust – say, gold – if it would injure the receiver, and if both parties are friends, is not the repayment of what is owed; that is what you would think he would say?

Yes.

And are enemies also to receive what we owe them?

Certainly, he said, they are to receive what we owe them. An enemy, I take it, owes an enemy that which is due or proper to him – namely, something bad.

Simonides apparently spoke of the nature of justice in that way poets speak – very obscurely; for he really meant that justice is giving to each man his due; this he termed a debt.

That must have been what he meant, he said.

By Olympus! I replied; and if we asked him what due or proper thing is provided by the craft of medicine, and to whom, what answer do you think that he would give?

He would of course reply that medicine provides drugs and meat and drink to human bodies.

And what good thing is provided by the cook's art, and to what?

Flavor to food.

And what is it that justice gives, and to whom?

Assuming, Socrates, that we are to proceed on the basis of the analogy, then justice is that craft which provides good to friends and evil to enemies.

Then he means that justice is doing good to your friends and evil to your enemies?

I think so.

And who is best able to do good to his friends and evil to his enemies with regard to sickness and health?

The physician.

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

The ship's pilot.

And with regard to what actions, and with a view to what end, is the just man best able to harm his enemies, while doing good to friends?

In warring against the one, and siding with the other.

But isn't a doctor useless to those who aren't sick, Polemarchus?

That's true.

And a ship's pilot is likewise useless to those who don't sail?

Yes.

Then justice will be useless to men who aren't at war?

I can hardly agree with that.

You think justice may also be of use in peace?

Yes.

Like farming for getting grain?

Yes.

Or shoemaking for getting shoes – that is what you mean?

Yes.

So what similar use or profitable power does justice have in time of peace?

When it comes to making contracts, Socrates, justice is of use.

And by contracts you mean partnerships?

Exactly.

But is the just man or the skillful player a more useful partner at a game of, say, bowling?

The skillful player.

And when it comes to laying stones or bricks is the just man a more useful partner than the mason?

The opposite is the case.

Then in what sort of partnership is the just man a better partner than the mason, or than the harp-player – in just the way that the harp-player is the better partner when it comes to plucking the right notes?

In partnerships concerned with money, I think.

Yes, Polemarchus, but surely not in the use of money; for you don't want a just man to go in with you when it is time to buy or sell a horse; a man who knows horses would be altogether better, no?

Certainly.

And when you want to buy a ship, you go in with a shipwright or pilot?

True.

Then in what joint venture of gold or silver is the just man to be preferred?

When you want the money to be kept safely in trust.

You mean when money is not wanted, but put away somewhere for the time being?

Precisely.

That is to say, justice is useful while the money is useless?

That is the inference.

In the same way, when you want to keep a pruning-hook safe, justice is useful to the individual and to the state; but when you want to use it, better call a gardener?

Clearly.

And when you want to keep a shield or lyre safe, not use them, you would say justice is useful; but when you want to use them, a soldier or musician is the man for you?

Certainly.

And so on and so forth in all other such things; always justice is useful when the things concerned are useless, useless when they are useful?

It would follow.

Justice surely doesn't turn out to be worth much if it's only useful in connection with useless things. But let us consider a further point: isn't it true that the man who is the best at landing punches – in a boxing match or in any kind of fighting – is also best at blocking punches?

Certainly.

He who is best at preventing or curing disease is also best at inducing it?

True.

He who is best at securing an army camp is also best at stealing a march on the enemy, regarding all their stratagems and affairs?

Certainly.

Then he who is a good holder of anything is also a good thief of it?

That, I suppose, would follow.

Then if the just man is good at holding money, he is good at stealing it.

According to our argument, so it would seem.

Then, at the end of it all, the just man has turned out to be a sort of thief. This is a lesson I suspect you must have learnt out of Homer. One of his favorites was Autolycus, the grandfather of Odysseus, whose praises are sung like so:

"He exceeded all men in theft and lies."

So you, Homer and Simonides all agree that justice is an art of theft, practiced "to help friends and harm foes," – that was what you were saying?

No, certainly not – though now I don't know what I did mean.

But I still say justice is helping friends and harming enemies.

By 'friends' do we mean those who appear to each man to be worthy, or rather those who actually are, even if they don't seem to be? And I would ask the same concerning enemies.

Probably people become friends with those they think are good, and grow to hate the ones they judge evil.

Yes, but don't people often make mistakes about this, so that many of those they believe are good aren't, and vice versa?

People do make mistakes.

Then in their eyes those who are good will be enemies and those who are evil will be friends?

Yes.

In that case these people will be right to do good to evil people and evil to good ones?

Clearly.

But the good are just, and the sort who would not do wrong?

True.

Then according to your argument it is right to harm those who do no wrong?

No, Socrates; this result is wrong.

Then I suppose we are right to harm the unjust, and aid the just?

I think it comes out better that way.

But note what follows. For all those who are mistaken in their judgments about men it will be right to harm their friends, for they are wicked, and aid their enemies, who are actually good. But in affirming this we say the opposite of what we said Simonides meant.

That certainly is the result, he said. Let's make a correction: we probably haven't defined the words 'friend' and 'enemy' properly.

How did we define them, Polemarchus? I asked.

We said that someone who seems good is a friend.

How are we going to fix the problem?

We should say instead that he is a friend who doesn't just seem, but truly is, good. One who only seems good, but isn't, only seems a friend, but isn't; the same goes for enemies.

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

Yes.

So instead of simply saying, as we did, that it is just to do good to our friends and evil to our enemies, we should say in addition: it is just to do good to our friends when they are good and evil to our enemies when they are evil?

Yes indeed, he said, that seems very well put.

But should the just man injure anyone at all?

Undoubtedly he should injure those who are both wicked and his enemies.

When horses are injured, are they thereby improved or made worse?

They become worse.

Worse, that is, with respect to those virtues that make horses into good horses – not, say, with respect to those virtues that make dogs into good dogs.

The horses are made worse as horses.

And injured dogs are made worse with respect to their doggish virtues, not their horsely ones?

Of course.

And about men, won't we have to say that when injured they are made worse with respect to their proper virtues as men?

Certainly.

But justice is the special virtue of humans?

Necessarily.

Then men who are harmed, my dear friend, are necessarily made unjust?

It seems likely.

But can the musician, by performing music, make men unmusical?

Impossible.

Or the rider by riding make bad riders?

Not at all.

Then can the just by justice make men unjust? In general, can good men make evil ones by means of virtue?

Assuredly not.

For I don't think it's the characteristic function of heat to make things cold; rather, the opposite of heat has that function.

Yes.

Nor does dryness, but rather its opposite, make things wet.

That's quite right.

Nor then is it the characteristic function of the good to do harm, but that of its opposite?

It seems so.

And the just man is a good man?

Certainly.

Then to injure someone, whether a friend or anyone else at all, is not the act of a just man, but an unjust man – his very opposite?

I think what you've said is the absolute truth, [335e] Socrates.

Then if someone says justice consists in paying debts, and means by that that the just man owes a debt of harm to his enemies and one of aid to his friends – this saying is hardly a pearl of wisdom; for it cannot be true, if, as has been shown, it is never right to harm anyone.

I agree with you, said Polemarchus.

In which case you and I are prepared to fight side by side against any who attributes such a saying to Simonides or Bias or Pittacus, or any other wise man or prophet?

I am quite ready to fight by your side, he said.

Shall I tell you who I think authored this saying, that justice is to aid one's friends and harm one's enemies?

Who?

I believe it was Periander or Perdiccas or Xerxes or Ismenias the Theban, or some other rich and mighty man, who held his power dear.

What you say is very true, he said.

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

Many times in the course of this discussion Thrasymachus had tried to jump in and interrupt the argument, but had been prevented by the rest of those present, who wanted to hear things out. Now, when I had just said this and Polemarchus and I had paused, he could contain himself no longer. Gathering himself up, he burst out like a wild beast bent on tearing and devouring us. We were quite panic-stricken at the sight of him.

He roared out to the whole lot of us: what nonsense have you prize idiots been spouting, Socrates? And why do the both of you give way, ridiculously, to what the other says? I say that if you really want to know what justice is, you should not only ask the question. You like to compete; you want to win; and you know it's easier to win when you ask than when you answer. Now you answer the question yourself, and say what *you* think justice is. And I won't have any of this 'justice is what ought to be' or 'the beneficial', or 'the profitable', or 'the advantageous'. None of this nonsense will do for me, since what I want instead is a bit of clarity and precision.

I was near panic at hearing this outburst, and I could hardly meet his gaze. In fact, I think that if I had not just then looked Thrasymachus right in the eye, I would have been silenced: but when I saw his irritation showing through, I looked right at him; that allowed me to reply.

Thrasymachus, I said, with just a slight hitch in my voice, don't be so critical of us. Polemarchus and I may be guilty of making mistakes in our argument, but you know perfectly well we weren't doing it on purpose. If we were looking for a piece of gold, you wouldn't say that we were 'giving way to each other,' and thereby destroying our chances of finding it. Why, then, when we are seeking justice – a thing more precious than much gold – do you assert that we are stupidly giving in to each other and not doing our utmost to get at the truth? You know it isn't so, my good friend; it's just that we aren't capable. And since that is the way of it, people like you – who are so terribly clever – should pity us instead of being angry.

How like you, Socrates! he replied, with a bitter laugh. Hercules knows there's no mistaking your usual irony! I knew it – didn't I just say it? – that whatever he

was asked he would refuse to answer. He falls back on irony, shuffling his feet rather than answering the straight question put to him.

You are a philosopher, Thrasymachus, I replied, so I think you can appreciate how, if someone asks a man to say what numbers make up twelve, and while he asks adds, 'Don't, my good man, say that twelve is twice six, or three times four, or six times two, or four times three, for I won't accept any nonsense like that from you' – I think it must be clear to you that no one could answer the question when put that way. But what if he said to you, 'Thrasymachus, what do you mean? Am I not supposed to give any of those answers you forbid? What if one of them is the right answer, you uncanny man; am I supposed to lie and say it is some other number? [337c] Is this what you want?' – How would you answer?

The way you talk, you would think the two cases had something in common.

Why shouldn't they? I replied; and even if they don't, but it appears to the one being questioned that they do, shouldn't he speak his mind whether we forbid him or not?

I expect then, he said, that you are going to make one of the forbidden answers?

I wouldn't be too astonished if I did – if upon reflection I think any of them is any good.

But what if I give you an answer about justice, he said – one different from and better than any of these? What penalty should you have to pay then?

What else, I said, than the penalty ignorant people always pay to the wise? The proper penalty is learning the answer from one who knows it, and this is what I think I deserve to suffer.

You are so naïve, he said. In addition to the penalty of learning, you'll have to pay money.

I will pay when I have some money, I replied.

It's all right, Socrates, said Glaucon. If it is money you are worried about, Thrasymachus, we will all chip in to pay for Socrates' schooling.

Yes, he replied, and then Socrates will do as he always does – refuse to answer, while shredding someone else's answer.

But, my good friend, I said, how can anyone answer a question who doesn't know the answer, and says he doesn't know the answer; who, even if he knew a little something by way of answer, has in any case been all but forbidden to say what he thinks by a rather formidable man? No, you should talk instead, as you say you know the answer, and have something to say. So don't think of doing anything else, but be gracious enough to answer me, and don't selfishly keep silent, but speak up for the edification of Glaucon here, and everyone else.

As I was saying this, Glaucon and the rest of the company joined in my request and Thrasymachus, as anyone could see, was really eager to speak, because he thought he had an excellent answer, and would soon be standing tall in our eyes. For a while longer he held out, pretending to insist on my answering; but in the end he agreed to begin. Behold, he said, the wisdom of Socrates; he refuses to teach, and goes about learning from others, to whom he never pays so much as a 'thank you very much.'

That I learn from others, I replied, is quite true; but that I am ungrateful, I deny. I have no money, and therefore pay in praise, which is all I have to give. You will soon find out how ready I am to praise a good speaker; for I expect you will answer well.

Listen, then, he said; I declare that justice is nothing but the advantage of the stronger. And now why don't you all praise me? Oh, but wait. Of course you won't.

Let me first make sure I understand, I replied, for now I don't at all. Justice, you say, is the advantage of the stronger. But what, Thrasymachus, is this supposed to mean? You cannot mean to say that because Polydamas the wrestler is stronger than we are; and because eating beef makes him stronger still; and because eating beef is therefore to his advantage; that therefore justice for all of us is for him to eat more beef?

Your answer is disgusting, Socrates; you take hold of the argument at just the point where you know how to do it most harm.

Not at all, my good sir, I said; but try to express yourself more clearly.

Well, he said, perhaps you have heard about how forms of government differ from place to place; there are tyrannies, and democracies, and aristocracies?

Yes, I know.

And the government is the ruling power in each state?

Certainly.

And each government establishes laws with an eye to its own advantage – the democracy making democratic laws and the tyranny tyrannical ones, and so forth. And these laws, which are made by them for their advantage, are the justice which they hand down to their subjects. And whoever breaks these laws is punished as an unjust lawbreaker. And that is what I mean when I say that in all states there is the same principle of justice: namely, the advantage of the established government. And as the government must be supposed to have power, the only reasonable conclusion to be drawn is that everywhere you go there is but one principle of justice: namely, the advantage of the stronger.

Now I understand you, I said; whether you are right or not I will try to discover. But first let me say that in defining justice you yourself used the word 'advantage' which you forbade me to use. It is true, however, that in your definition the words 'of the stronger' were added.

A little something added, maybe, he said.

Large or small, never mind about that: we must first look into the question of whether what you have said is true or not. Now we both agree that justice is advantage of some sort, but you go on to say "of the stronger"; I'm not sure about this, and must therefore consider further.

Proceed, he said.

I will, I said. First tell me, do you admit that it is just for subjects to obey their rulers?

I do.

But are the rulers of each of these states absolutely infallible, or do they sometimes make mistakes?

Obviously, he replied, they sometimes make mistakes.

Then in making their laws they may sometimes make them the right way, sometimes the wrong way?

I agree.

When they make them rightly, they make them to their own advantage; when they make a mistake, the laws are not made to their advantage; do you agree?

Yes.

Anyway, the laws which are made must be obeyed by the subjects – and that is what you call justice?

No doubt about it.

Then justice, by your argument, is not only obedience to the advantage of the stronger, but also the reverse, what is not to his advantage?

What are you talking about? he asked.

I am only repeating what you said, I think. Here, let's consider: haven't we admitted that the rulers can mistakenly betray their own advantage by making the commands they do, and also that for those who are ruled to obey these commands is justice? Didn't you say as much?

Yes.

Then you have agreed that it is just to do what is to the disadvantage of those who rule and are stronger, whenever the rulers unintentionally command things which are bad for them. For if, as you say, it is just to perform those very things which the rulers command, in that case – O, wisest of men – is there any escape from the conclusion that it is just to do the opposite of what you say? For the weaker are commanded to do what is to the disadvantage of the stronger?

By Zeus, this is clear as day, Socrates, said Polemarchus.

Yes, said Cleitophon, breaking in, if anyone asked *you* to be a witness.

Who needs witnesses? said Polemarchus. Thrasymachus plainly admitted rulers may sometimes make commands not to their advantage, and that for subjects to obey these commands is justice.

But, Polemarchus, Thrasymachus said that for subjects to do what was commanded of them by their rulers is just.

Yes, Cleitophon, but he also said justice is the interest of the stronger; and, while holding both these positions, he admitted as well that the stronger may command the weaker, who are his subjects, to do things that are not to his advantage; it follows that justice is just as much the injury as the interest of the stronger

But, said Cleitophon, when he said ‘the advantage of the stronger’, he meant what the stronger thought to be his advantage – this was what the weaker had to do; this is what he said justice is.

That isn’t what he said, retorted Polemarchus.

Never mind that, Polemarchus, I replied. If he now says this is how it is, let us accept his statement.

Tell me, Thrasymachus, is this what you meant to say justice was: what the stronger thought to be his advantage, whether it really is or not? Shall we say this is what you mean?

Absolutely not, he said. Do you think I would call someone who makes a mistake ‘the stronger’ at just the moment when he makes some mistake?

Yes, I said, my distinct impression was that this was exactly what you did when you admitted that the ruler was not infallible but might sometimes make mistakes

You argue like a slanderous witness in court, Socrates. For example, do you call someone who is mistaken about the sick ‘a doctor’ just in virtue of the fact that he is mistaken? Or do you say that he who makes mistakes in math is a

mathematician *when* he is making the mistake, and *precisely because* he is mistaken? It's true that we say 'the doctor has made a mistake' or 'the mathematician has made a mistake' or 'the grammarian has made a mistake', but this is just a loose way of talking. For I think none of them, insofar as he *is* what we call him, ever makes a mistake. So, to be perfectly strict about it – since you are such a stickler for strictness – no skilled craftsman ever makes a mistake. It is when his knowledge fails him that he goes astray, and in that moment of failure he is not really a skilled craftsman. And so, no craftsman, wise man, or ruler makes a mistake while he is a ruler in the strict sense, though people do commonly say, 'the doctor has made a mistake' or 'the ruler has made a mistake'. When I answered you just now I was talking in this common way. To be perfectly precise we should say that the ruler, insofar as he is a ruler, does *not* make mistakes, and *never* mistakes his own advantage when he lays down commands; and the subject is required to execute these commands. Therefore – as I said in the first place, and now I say it again – justice is the advantage of the stronger.

All right then, Thrasymachus. But do I really seem to you to argue like someone committing perjury in court?

That's for sure, he replied.

So you must think I put these questions to you with the intent of personally libeling you in the argument?

I don't think it; I know it. But it's not going to get you anywhere: you can't harm me by stealth, and you will never beat me by sheer force of argument.

I wouldn't dream of trying, my dear man; but in order to prevent this sort of thing from happening again, please define in what sense you speak of the ruler, or stronger or superior one, whose advantage – so you say – it is just that the inferior should serve? Is he the ruler in the loose sense of the word, or the strict sense?

In the strictest of all senses, he said. And now, go ahead; smear me if you can; tell your lies, but I'm not letting you get away with anything! You'll never succeed – never!

Do you think, I said, that I am crazy enough to spread libels about the great Thrasymachus? I might as well shave a lion in his den.

Why, he said, you tried to libel me a minute ago, only you failed.

Enough of these pleasantries, I said. Just tell me this: what does the physician do, in the strict sense you articulated just now? Does he heal the sick, or does he make money? And remember, I am now speaking of the true physician.

He heals the sick, he replied.

And the ship's pilot – I mean, the true pilot – is he a captain of sailors or a mere sailor?

A captain of sailors.

The fact that he sails about in a ship is not what is important here; nor the fact that he is called a sailor; the name 'pilot', which states his rank, has nothing to do with sailing; it signifies his skill and authority over the other sailors.

That's exactly right, he said.

Now, I said, there is some advantage for the sailors and sick people in these cases?

Certainly.

Towards which the craft, I said, is directed; it seeks to secure and furnish this advantage to them?

Yes, that's the point.

And is there any advantage for each of the crafts aside from its becoming as perfect as possible?

What are you talking about?

It's like this, I said. Suppose you were to ask me whether the body is self-sufficient, or whether it has needs. I would reply: the body definitely has needs, because it can fall ill and can't cure itself; this is why the art of medicine was invented. The art was constructed to this end, to provide these advantages to the body. Do you think I'm right in saying this, I asked, or not?

Quite right, he replied.

But does the art of medicine get sick itself? Or can any other art be in need of some virtue or quality – as the eye can need sight, and the ear hearing, so that they require some art to seek out and provide this advantage to them? Can there be any fault in the art itself, so that each art requires some further art to seek out what is advantageous to it, and another art must be found for the second one, and so on to infinity? Does each art even look to what is advantageous to itself? Or do the arts in fact have no need even of themselves to seek out a remedy for any defect, let alone of each other? For no art has either any defect or error in itself, nor is it the business of any art to seek anything other than what is advantageous to its own subject. For isn't every true art pure and faultless, so long as it is precisely and entirely itself? - Consider that we are speaking in your precise sense. Am I right?

Quite clearly you are, he said.

Then medicine does not serve the interests of medicine, but the interests of the body?

True, he said.

And the point of the art of caring for horses is not to care for the art of caring for horses, just to care for horses; and the same goes for all the rest of the arts, since they don't need anything; they care only for the purposes they serve?

True, he said.

But surely, Thrasy-machus, the arts are overseers and rulers of their own subjects?

He agreed to this rather reluctantly.

Then, I said, no craft considers or commands the advantage of the ruler or superior, only that of the subject it rules and the inferior?

He tried to fight against this conclusion, but in the end agreed to it.

Once he had agreed I continued, saying: then no physician either, insofar as he is a physician, considers his own good in what he prescribes; he considers rather what is good for the patient. For you agreed that the physician in the strict sense is a ruler having the human body as his subject; he is not a mere money-maker. You granted this much?

Yes.

The same goes for the ship's pilot, in the strict sense of the term; he is a ruler of sailors and not a mere sailor?

That has been admitted.

And such a pilot and ruler will consider and command with a weather eye to the best interests of those serving under him. He will not simply pursue his private advantage?

He gave a reluctant 'yes'.

If that's so, Thrasy-machus, then there is no one in any command position, insofar as he is a true commander, who gives commands for things that are to his own advantage. He always commands what is in the best interest of those he rules, or the subject-matter of his art. He looks to that, and that alone, in all that he says and does.

When we had gotten to this point in the argument, and every one saw that the definition of justice had been completely upset, Thrasy-machus, instead of replying, asked: Tell me, Socrates, have you got a nanny?

Why do you ask, I said? You really ought to be answering my questions, not posing new ones.

Because she lets you go around sniveling and never wipes your snotty nose: she has not even taught you to tell the difference between the shepherd and the sheep

What makes you say that? I replied.

Because you imagine that the shepherd or cowherd fattens or tends his flock with a view to their advantage and not his own, or his master's; and in particular you imagine that the rulers of states, if they are real rulers, never think of their subjects as sheep, and that they are not looking to their own advantage day and night. Oh, no; and you are so far off the mark in your ideas of the just and unjust that you don't even realize that justice and the just are in reality another's advantage; that is to say, the advantage of the ruler – the strong one – and loss for the subject or servant; and injustice is the opposite; for the unjust man is lord over justice's naive followers: he is the stronger, and his subjects do what is to his advantage; they minister to his pleasure, which is very far from being their own. And a fool like you would do well to consider this as well, Socrates: the just man is always a loser compared to the unjust man. First, he loses when it comes to private contracts: when a just man has an unjust partner, and the partnership is at an end, the unjust man walks away with more and the just man gets less. Second, in dealings with the state: when it's time to pay income tax, the just man pays more and the unjust man less on the same amount of income; likewise, when there is anything to be gotten the one gains nothing, the other much. Look also at what happens when it comes to serving in public office; here we see the just man neglecting his own affairs and perhaps suffering other losses – getting nothing out of it for himself – all because he is just. To make matters still worse, he is hated by his friends and associates because he refuses to help them bend and break the law. But the tables are turned in the case of the unjust man. I am speaking, as I have been from the very start, of injustice committed on an overwhelming scale – you can judge for yourself how much greater an advantage in private affairs the unjust man will have as compared to the just. My meaning will be most clearly seen if we turn to that highest form of injustice – the case in which the criminal is the happiest man on earth, and his victims, and those who refuse to commit crime on his behalf are the most miserable. In a word, I speak of tyranny, when, by force or fraud, property is stolen from its owners not little by little but wholesale. Everything goes into one bag: sacred things as well as profane – private and public. Were these acts committed on a petty scale and detected, they would be severely punished – the perpetrator suffering great disgrace. Those who commit such petty crimes are called temple robbers, kidnappers, burglars, con-men and thieves. But if only a man will go to the additional trouble of relieving his victims of their freedom, along with the contents of their pocketbooks – if only he turns them from citizens into slaves – why, then, instead of suffering insults and accusations, he is deemed happy and blessed, not only by his victims, but by all who hear that he has ascended to the very pinnacle of perfect injustice. For men denounce injustice because they fear

they may be victims of it, not because they are averse to committing it themselves. Thus, as I have shown, Socrates, complete injustice, committed on a grand scale, has more strength and freedom and mastery than justice; and – as I declared from the very start – justice is the advantage of the stronger, whereas injustice is a man's own profit and interest.

Thrasymachus, when he was done pouring out this veritable bathtub of words down the drains of our ears, obviously had a mind to get up and leave. But the whole lot of us would not let him; we insisted he should remain and defend his position; and I myself added my own humble request to this chorus of voices. Thrasymachus, I said to him, excellent man – how suggestive is everything that you say! Surely you won't run off before teaching, and being taught, on the subject of whether all this is true or not? Is this such a small matter in your eyes – a determination of how each of us should live his whole life in the best possible way?

You think I don't see the importance of this question?

You appear not to, I replied, or else you do not care for any of us, Thrasymachus. It's the same to you whether if we live better or worse, on account of not knowing what you say you know. So please, friend, do not hide the light of your wisdom under a bushel; it will not be a bad investment for you to do so many of us a good turn. For my own part, I openly declare that I am not convinced, and that I do not believe injustice to be more profitable than justice, even if unhindered and allowed to have complete play. Let us assume there is an unjust man, let him be capable of committing injustice by fraud or force: all the same I am not convinced injustice is advantageous. There may be another among us who is in the same predicament I am, so that I am not the only one. Persuade us then, you excellent gentleman, really persuade us that we are wrong 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 cram the proof down your throat, right into your very souls?

Zeus forbid! I said, don't do that. But first, stand by your original arguments; or, if you change your mind, change it openly; let there be no deception. For I do declare, Thrasymachus, that if you will only recall what was previously said, you must see that although you began by defining the true physician in an exact sense, you did not observe similar exactness when speaking of the shepherd; you thought that the shepherd, insofar as he is a shepard, tends the sheep – not with a view to the good of the sheep, but like a diner or gourmet, with a view to the pleasures of eating mutton; or, again, with a view to selling in the market, like a trader, not a shepherd. Yet surely the art of the shepherd is concerned only with how to provide the best for those sheep over which it is set, since the perfection of his art is already ensured whenever all the requirements of it are satisfied. It's just as I thought we found it necessary to agree a little while ago about every form of rule: when it is rule in the precise sense – whether public or private – it doesn't consider anything other than the advantage of the subjects or the ones

cared for. You, on the other hand, seem to think that the rulers of states – that is to say, the true rulers – actually like being in positions of authority.

I don't think it, by Zeus. I know it!

What about this, Thrasymachus, I said. Don't you know men never volunteer for lower offices, but instead ask for pay; this implies the benefits of ruling are not going to go to them, but to the ones they rule? Let me ask you a question: don't we say that each of the various arts is distinct from the others in virtue of some distinct power or function? And, my dear exalted friend, do say what you think, that we may make a little progress.

Yes, that's what makes them distinct, 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 getting paid has the special function of making us money. Would you say that the art of medicine and that of navigation are the same? Or, if you want to define things with your usual precision, if the navigator becomes healthy because sailing on the sea is good for him, would you call his craft medicine rather than navigation on that account?

Certainly not.

You won't say either that, just because a man happens to be in good health on payday, that therefore getting paid is medicine?

I should say not.

Nor would you say that medicine is the art of getting paid, just because a man takes fees when he heals someone?

Certainly not.

And we have admitted, I said, that each art aims at some particular benefit peculiar to it?

Granted.

Then whatever benefit all craftsmen enjoy must clearly result from their joint practice of some one thing common to them?

Probably, he replied.

And when the craftsman is benefited by making money this is due to some application of the fine art of getting paid?

He agreed reluctantly to this.

Then the benefit of getting paid money doesn't come to the various craftsmen by the practice of their various crafts. If we look carefully we'll see that while the art of medicine is giving health and that of building is building buildings, another art is running alongside them all: the art of getting paid. And so the various crafts are doing their particular work, benefiting the subjects over which they rule. But would the craftsman himself receive any benefit from his art if money wasn't added into the mix?

It doesn't seem like it, he said.

Doesn't he even provide a benefit when he works for nothing?

I think he does.

Then, Thrasymachus, it's clear now that neither crafts nor governments provide what is beneficial to themselves. It is all just the way we said earlier: they prepare and command for the interests of their subjects; the strong rulers, attend to the good of these weaker ones, not their own good. And this is why, my dear Thrasymachus – as I was just now saying – no one volunteers to govern; because no one likes to take up the weary task of righting wrongs which are not his private concern. Instead he asks to be paid for it, because the man who is going to practise his craft well, never does or orders what is best for himself, when he issues orders in accordance with his art, but always what is best for his subjects. For this reason, it seems, potential rulers must be paid in one of three sorts of coinage: money, or honor, or punishment for refusing.

What are you saying, Socrates? said Glaucon. The first two modes of payment make sense, I suppose, but what the punishment is I don't quite see, or how a punishment can even be a payment.

You mean that you don't understand the nature of this payment which, to the best men, is the greatest inducement of all to take up the reins of power? Of course you know that ambition and greed are held to be, and indeed are, disgraceful?

I do, he said.

This, I said, is why the best men are not willing to rule for the sake of money or honor; they don't wish to be seen openly demanding payment for service in government; that would earn them the name of hired hand; nor do they wish to earn the name of thief, by dipping their hand in the public till. Not being ambitious they do not care about honor. As a result of all this, a yoke of compulsion and penalty must be laid upon their necks, if they are to consent to rule. And this, I imagine, is the reason why willingly seeking office, when one might have waited to be compelled, has been deemed dishonorable. For the essence of the punishment is that he who refuses to rule is liable to end up being ruled by one worse than himself. The way I look at it, fear of this bad result makes the

good take office, whenever they do, and then they approach it, not as something good or in the expectation of enjoying themselves, but as a necessary evil since they are unable to foist off the chore of ruling on anyone as good or better than themselves. Indeed, if there were a city entirely peopled by good men, we might well find men would contend as eagerly to avoid public office as they do here to obtain it. In that place it would become quite clear that the nature of the true ruler is not to look after his own interests, but rather those of his subjects; and every one who knew this would choose rather to receive a benefit from another, instead of being put to the trouble of conferring them all around. So I am about as far as it is possible to be 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 than that of the just, this fresh claim appears to me to be a far more serious one. Which one of us has told the truth? And which sort of life, Glaucon, do you prefer?

For my part, I certainly think the life of the just is more advantageous, he answered.

You did hear, though, all those advantages of injustice that Thrasymachus rehearsed for our benefit?

Yes, I heard, he replied, but he hasn't persuaded me.

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

We certainly ought to try, he replied.

If, I said, we set against his speech a speech of our own, recounting all the advantages of being just, and then he answers and we answer back, in the end there would have to be a weighing of the goods piled up by each side, and for that we would need judges; but if we proceed in our investigation as we have been doing, by simply admitting when a good point has been made, it will be as if we have found a way to be both advocate and judge, at the same time.

That's certainly right, he said.

Which method do you prefer? I asked.

The one you propose.

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

Yes, I say it, and I have given you my reasons.

And what is your view about these two items in question? Would you call one of them virtue and the other vice?

Certainly.

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

How agreeable that would be! And ever so likely, seeing that I affirm injustice to be profitable and justice unprofitable.

What else then would you say instead?

The very opposite, he replied.

So you would call justice vice?

No, I think I would call it 'lofty naivete'.

Then would you call injustice malignity?

No; I think it would be better to label it 'prudent counsel'.

And do the unjust appear to you to be wise and good?

Yes, he said; at least those who have the power to be overwhelmingly unjust, and therefore have the power of bringing whole states and countries to their knees; because maybe you think I've been advocating a line-up of common criminals. It is true that robbery – as a profession – has its profitable side, so long as business is conducted discretely; but common thieves are not in the same league with those of whom I have been speaking.

I don't think I actually have missed your point, Thrasymachus, I replied; but still I am quite amazed at the thought that you class injustice with wisdom and virtue, and justice with the opposite.

Certainly I do class them in this way.

Now you are making things harder, I said; at any rate, it's hard to know what to say. For take this injustice you say is so profitable; if it were admitted by you to amount to shameful vice, in spite of profits, an answer might be given to you on the basis of conventional moral notions; but by now I can see perfectly well that you will just go on to say that injustice is strong and honorable; to the unjust you will attribute all the qualities which were attributed earlier to the just, seeing that you do not hesitate to place injustice with wisdom and virtue.

You have foreseen most infallibly, he replied.

That being the case, I certainly should not hesitate to look deeply into this matter, since I have reason to believe that you, Thrasymachus, are actually speaking your mind. I think you are really serious about this; you aren't just having us all on for a joke.

I may be serious or not, but what's that to you? – your job is to refute the argument.

Very true, I said; that is what I have to do: but will you be so extremely good as answer just one more question? Does the just man try to gain any advantage over the just?

Far from it; if he did that he would not be the simple, unassuming creature he is.

And would he try to do better than to do justice?

He would not.

How would he regard any attempt to gain an advantage over the unjust; would that be considered by him to be just or would it be unjust?

He would think it just, and would try to gain the advantage; but he would not be able to do so.

Whether he would or would not be able, I said, is not to the point. My question is whether the just man, while refusing to have more than another just man, would wish and claim to have more than the unjust has?

Yes, he would.

And what of the unjust – does he claim to have more than the just man, and to do more than what is just?

Of course, he said; he seeks to have more than all men.

And so the unjust man will strive and struggle to obtain more than the unjust man, in order that he may have more than everyone?

True.

We may put the matter this way, I said. The just man does not desire more than those like him have, but does desire more than those unlike him have; whereas the unjust desires more than both his like and his unlike?

You've got it.

And the unjust is good and wise, and the just is neither of these?

Right again, he said.

And isn't the unjust like the wise and good and the just unlike them?

Of course, he said. He who is of a certain nature is like others who are also of that nature; he who is not, not.

Each of them, I said, is like his like?

Certainly, he replied.

Very good, Thrasymachus, I said. Now you would admit that one man is a musician and another not?

Yes.

And who is skillful and who foolish, when it comes to music?

Clearly the musician is skillful; he who is not is foolish.

And he is good insofar as he is skillful, and bad insofar 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 tuning his lyre would want or claim to exceed or go beyond a fellow musician, when it comes to tightening and loosening the strings just so?

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 food and drink 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 any man who has knowledge would even 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, cannot be denied.

And what of the ignorant man? would he not desire to have more than both he who knows and he who does not?

I dare say he would.

And he who knows is wise?

Yes.

And he who is wise is good?

True.

Then the wise and good man will not desire to get the better of his like, but of his unlike and opposite?

I suppose so.

Whereas the bad and ignorant will desire to get the better of both?

Yes.

But we said, didn't we, Thrasymachus, that the unjust goes beyond both his like and unlike? Weren't these your words?

They were.

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

Yes.

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

That seems to follow

And each of them is like his like?

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 readily, as I repeat them, but with deep reluctance; it was a hot summer's day, and the sweat poured off him in torrents; and then I saw something I had never seen before, Thrasymachus blushing. As we were now agreed that justice was virtue and wisdom, injustice vice and ignorance, I proceeded to another point.

Well, I said, Thrasymachus, that matter is tidily 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 am satisfied with what you are saying or have no answer; if however I were to answer, you would be sure to accuse me of yelling; therefore either let me to have my say, or if you would rather ask the questions, do so, and I will answer 'very good,' and nod 'yes' and 'no', just like one does to an old woman who rattles on and on about nothing.

I wouldn't want you to go against your own beliefs.

Very well – just to please you – since you will not let me speak. What else would you have me do?

Nothing, by Zeus, I said; and if you are so disposed, I will now ask and you shall answer.

Proceed.

Then I will repeat the question I asked before, in order that our examination of the respective natures of justice and injustice may be advanced in a rigorous manner. The claim was made that injustice is stronger and more powerful than justice. But now justice, having been identified with wisdom and virtue, is easily shown to be stronger than injustice, since injustice is ignorance; this can no longer be seriously called in question. But I want to view the matter, Thrasymachus, in a different light: you would not deny that a state may be unjust and may be unjustly attempting to enslave other states, or may have already enslaved them, and may be holding many of them in subjection?

True, he replied; I would add only that the best and most perfectly unjust state will be most likely to do so the most.

I know, I said, that this was your position; but what I would further consider is whether this power which is possessed by the superior state can exist or be exercised without justice or only with justice.

If you are right in your view, and justice is wisdom, then only with justice; but if I am right, then without justice.

I am delighted, Thrasymachus, to see you not only nodding 'yes' and 'no', but making answers which are quite excellent.

I wouldn't want to seem ungracious, he replied.

You are too kind, I said; and would you have the good grace also to inform me whether you think that a state, or an army, or a band of robbers and thieves, or any other gang of criminal conspirators could act at all if they injured one another?

No indeed, he said, they could not.

But if they refrained from injuring one another, then they might work together more effectively?

Yes.

And this is because injustice creates factions and hatred and in-fighting, whereas justice imparts harmony and friendship; isn't that the way it works, Thrasymachus?

I agree, he said, because I do not wish to quarrel with you.

How good of you! I said. But I would like to know as well whether injustice, having this tendency to arouse hatred, wherever it springs up – among slaves or among free men – will not make them hate one another and set them at odds and make them incapable of coordinated action?

It certainly will.

And even if injustice is found in two people only, won't they quarrel and fight, and be enemies to one another and to the just?

They will.

And suppose injustice lurks in the heart of a single person, you uncanny fellow. Will it preserve its power to cause animosity and dissent?

Let us assume the power would remain.

But isn't the power which injustice exercises of such a nature that wherever it takes up residence, whether in a city, an army, a family, or any social unit, that body is, above all, rendered incapable of effective action because it is torn apart by strife; does it not become its own enemy, as well as the enemy of justice? Is not this the case?

Yes, certainly.

And isn't injustice just as fatal when it takes root in a single individual; in the first place rendering him incapable of action because he is not of one mind about anything; and in the second place making him an enemy to himself and to the just? Isn't this the case, Thrasymachus?

Yes.

And, O my friend, I said, surely the gods are just?

Granted; they are.

But if so, the unjust will be the enemies of the gods, and the just will be their friends?

Enjoy this rich banquet of words; I won't stop you from gorging yourself; I wouldn't want to upset anyone here by objecting.

Well then, keep answering, so that I can finish what I've got here on my plate. For we have already shown that the just are clearly wiser and better and abler than the unjust, and that the unjust are incapable of common action; in fact, we can go further. Take those evil men we were discussing. If they had been perfectly evil, they could not have restrained themselves among themselves. There must have been some remnant of justice in them that enabled them to combine long enough to injure some innocents before falling to fighting among themselves. They were only half-villain in the way they went about their joint venture, I expect; for had they been whole villains, and overwhelmingly unjust, they would never have gotten started. That, I believe, is the plain truth of the matter; not what you said before. But whether the just have a better and happier life than the unjust is a further question which we also proposed to consider. I think they do, for just the reasons that have been given; but still I should like to examine further. For this is a serious question – not smaller than the whole of human life.

Proceed.

I will proceed by asking a question: Would you not say that a horse has some function?

I should.

And the use or function of a horse – or of anything – would be that which could not be accomplished, or not as well, by any other thing?

I don't follow you.

Let me explain: can you see, except with your eyes?

Certainly not.

Or hear, except with your ears?

No.

These then may truly be said to be the functions of these organs?

They may.

But you can cut off a vine-branch with a dagger or with a chisel – in any number of ways, in fact?

Of course.

And yet nothing works quite as well as a pruning-hook, am I right?

True.

So we can say, then, that this is the function of a pruning-hook?

We may.

Then I think you should not have too much trouble understanding the question I asked – whether the function of anything would be that which could not be accomplished, or as well, by any other thing?

I see what you mean, he said, and agree.

And that which has some function has some virtue, enabling it to perform its function? Let's take it from the top. We say that eyes have a function?

Yes

And isn't there some virtue in eyes?

Yes.

And the ear, too, has its function and its virtue?

True.

And the same is true of all other things; each and every one has its function and virtue?

That is so.

Well, then. Can the eyes perform their function if they are lacking in the virtue that is peculiar to eyes – if they have some defect instead?

How can they, he said, if you mean that they are blind and cannot see?

Whatever their virtue may be. But you are getting a bit ahead of the game. I would first ask whether the things perform their functions perform by means of their peculiar virtues, and fail to do so through some defect?

Certainly, he replied.

I might say the same of ears; when deprived of their peculiar virtue they cannot perform their function?

True.

And the same observation will apply to all other things?

I agree.

Well, then; doesn't the soul have a function nothing else can perform? For example, to oversee and command and deliberate and the like? Aren't these the proper functions of the soul, and can they rightly be assigned to any other thing?

To no other thing.

And isn't living to be reckoned among the functions of the soul?

Assuredly, he said.

And doesn't the soul have a virtue as well?

Yes.

And can the soul perform its function if deprived of its peculiar virtue?

It cannot.

Then an evil soul must necessarily be an evil ruler and overseer, and the good soul a good ruler?

Yes, necessarily.

And we have admitted that justice is the virtue of the soul, and injustice its defect?

That has been admitted.

Then the just soul and the just man will live well, and the unjust man will live badly?

That is what your argument proves.

And he who lives well is blessed and happy, and he who lives badly is the opposite of happy?

Absolutely.

Then the just is happy, and the unjust wretched?

So be it.

But happiness and not misery is profitable.

Naturally.

Then, my blessed Thrasymachus, injustice can never be more profitable than justice.

Let this, Socrates, he said, be your feast at the banquet of Bendis.

For which I have you to thank, now that you have grown mild-mannered and stopped being so hard on me. All the same, I have not been wined and dined to my satisfaction; but that was my fault, not yours. As a glutton snatches a taste of every dish which is successively brought to table, not allowing himself time to enjoy the one before, so have I gone from one subject to the next without having discovered what I sought in the first place, the nature of justice. I left off that inquiry and turned away to consider whether justice is virtuous wisdom or evil folly; and when the further question came up about the advantages and disadvantages of justice and injustice, I could not refrain from moving on to that. And the result of it all is that I know nothing at all. For I don't know what justice is, and therefore I am hardly likely to know whether it is or is not a virtue, nor can I say whether the just man is happy or unhappy.