

Plato's *Republic*

An Introduction

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2. Taming the Beast

Socrates versus Thrasymachus

Book I

The last half of Book I (336a–354c) depicts Socrates' encounter with Thrasymachus. Like most characters in the *Republic*, Thrasymachus is a real person, and the views Plato attributes to him square with what is known of the historical Thrasymachus. Thrasymachus is a sophist—a professional, itinerant teacher of rhetoric, or the art of persuasion. Plato's worry about sophists is that their teaching is neither grounded in nor aimed at the truth; its only concern is persuasion.

Enter Thrasymachus: Justice Is Whatever Benefits the Powerful (1.336a–39b)

Thrasymachus bursts into the conversation like a wild beast, and Socrates twice remarks how frightening it was. His entrance might be merely an overly aggressive case of 'calling bullshit' were it not for the antipathy he clearly has for Socrates. Socrates asks questions but never answers them, Thrasymachus complains—and not, Thrasymachus thinks, because of any 'Socratic wisdom' of knowing that he does not know the answers, but because of his 'love of honor' (1.336c): Thrasymachus thinks that Socrates just wants to win arguments. He responds to Socrates' assertions of the value of justice as 'a thing more valuable than even a large quantity of gold' (1.336e) and of intellectual humility ('we are incapable of finding it' (1.336e)) with 'a loud,

sarcastic laugh', dismissing them as 'just Socrates' usual irony' (1.337a). This last charge might sound strange to modern ears; irony is often prized for its elegance. But here, irony (εἰρωνεία [*eirōneia*]) is seen as false modesty and thus a vice. In his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle rates irony—which he calls 'mock modesty'—as one of the vices flanking the virtue of truthfulness (roughly: being a straight shooter), the other being boastfulness,¹ and in his *Rhetoric* he notes that people often respond to irony with anger, since it can seem to show contempt.² Perhaps that is what earns Thrasymachus' ire.

In any case, Thrasymachus has an answer to Socrates' question about the nature of justice, one he is very proud of: 'justice is nothing other than the advantage of the stronger' (1.338c). Two things to notice straightaway about Thrasymachus' account are its political nature and its reductive, deflationary tone. By 'the stronger' he means the politically powerful, who make laws to benefit themselves; good people follow those rules, thinking it just to do so, which benefits the rule-makers. The definition's deflationary, reductive aspect is brought out in the 'nothing other than' locution. Claims that love *is nothing but* a biochemical phenomenon or a fairy tale or a social construction are meant to deflate the kinds of lofty claims one encounters at wedding receptions and on Valentine's Day cards. Thrasymachus offers his definition of justice in a similar vein.

Though Socrates and Thrasymachus agree that justice is beneficial, they disagree about whom it benefits. Socrates thinks that justice, like any character virtue, benefits its possessor: my being just makes my life better. Thrasymachus, who will soon deny that justice is a virtue at all, claims that my being just benefits someone else—namely, the politically powerful rule-makers, who benefit from my following the rules which they have crafted for their own benefit. A just person, Thrasymachus argues, always gets less than an unjust one (1.343d): they do not cheat their business partners or customers, they do not cheat on their taxes, and when they govern they make laws that benefit others rather than themselves.

We will see soon enough that Socrates rejects Thrasymachus' picture of what a happy or flourishing human life looks like. Thrasymachus is a materialist—not in the philosophical sense of thinking that there are no

1 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV.7 1127b22–31.

2 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, II.2 1379b30–31.

immaterial objects, but in the everyday sense of thinking that material success is the main goal of life and measure of success. Thrasymachus is also an egoist: one's own interests are the ultimate standard for how one should act. Note that the egoist does not counsel doing whatever one feels like doing at any moment, for that may not be in one's interest. Acting impulsively is often at odds with enlightened self-interest, so it is not something Thrasymachus endorses. And there may be times when following the rules will be to one's advantage, especially if one is likely to be caught and punished for breaking the rules. While it is almost always in one's interest to *appear* to be just—a point that Glaucon and Adeimantus will focus on in Book II—it is rarely in one's interest to actually *be* just, Thrasymachus thinks. On his view, people who wish to be just are either naïve simpletons who cluelessly enable their own exploitation, or they are savvy enough to recognize their own inability to act unjustly with impunity and so agree to the rules in order to protect themselves against those strong enough to do so. Justice is for the weak, he thinks: 'Those who reproach injustice do so because they are afraid not of doing it but of suffering it' (1.344c).

Five Arguments Against Thrasymachus' Definition of Justice

There is more to say about Thrasymachus' definition of justice, but the best way to do that is to turn to the arguments Socrates gives against it. As with the conversations with Cephalus and Polemarchus, Socrates will argue from premises that Thrasymachus accepts to conclusions that are at odds with those premises. That is, he will try to show that Thrasymachus' view is at odds with itself, and thus that Thrasymachus himself has reason to discard or at least revise his view. Socrates makes five such arguments. The first two target Thrasymachus' answer to the *Republic's* first question about the nature of justice—that is, his claim that justice is whatever benefits the stronger. The last three target his answer to the *Republic's* second question about whether a just life is happier than an unjust one. We will take them each in turn.

The Error Argument (1.338c–343a)

I have dubbed the first argument 'the error argument' because it turns on the possibility that rulers, being fallible, are prone to error in crafting laws. The argument is straightforward. Thrasymachus agrees that justice is or at least requires following laws laid down by the rulers. But rulers, being fallible, sometimes make mistakes and thus enact laws that are *not* in their own interests. So—sometimes, at least—justice *is not* what benefits the stronger. Since on Socrates' view an adequate definition of a thing's essence must not allow for exceptions, Thrasymachus' definition must be rejected or revised, since there are times when justice does not benefit the stronger. Reconstructed in premise-conclusion form, Socrates' Error Argument against Thrasymachus goes like this:

- P1 In a political system, the rulers are stronger than the ruled.
(1.339a)
- P2 Justice is (obedience to) whatever the rulers command. (1.339c)
- P3 Rulers sometimes err and do not command what is to their advantage. (1.339d)
- C So, justice is not (always) the advantage of the stronger.
(1.339d)

The argument seems deductively valid; that is, its conclusion must be true if its premises are true. Since Thrasymachus rejects the conclusion, rational consistency requires him to reject at least one of the premises. Hopefully this requirement makes sense. Since the argument is valid, if all its premises are true, its conclusion would have to be true. So if I think the conclusion of a valid argument is false, I cannot think that all the premises are in fact true, because if the premises were in fact true, the conclusion would be true, too. It is irrational to think that all the premises of a valid argument are in fact true and to think that the conclusion that follows from them is false. If I think the conclusion of a valid argument is false, I must also think at least one of the premises is false.

Someone who does not value consistency will be unmoved by all of this. We have probably all encountered a kind of skepticism—and perhaps embodied it with youthful exuberance—that is skeptical about

consistency itself. ‘What is so great about consistency?’, such a skeptic asks. ‘Who cares if I am being inconsistent?’ If the skeptic is bookish, they might even quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson’s well-known essay, ‘Self-Reliance’: ‘A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines’.³ Or they might appeal to F. Scott Fitzgerald’s assertion in *The Crack-Up* that ‘the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function’.⁴ One way to respond to our skeptic is to point out that for Emerson the bogeyman wasn’t consistency but rather *foolish* consistency: ‘With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do [...] Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said to-day’.⁵ It is refusing to change one’s mind that Emerson is attacking here. And Fitzgerald is not questioning the value of consistency or celebrating inconsistency; he is concerned less with belief than he is with action: ‘One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise’.⁶ There is nobility in fighting the good fight, he suggests, even when we do not believe we will succeed.

Ultimately, though, if the skeptic continues to deny the value of consistency, there is little one can say to convince them otherwise, since rational argument depends upon consistency. Such a person is in effect demanding a sound argument for why they should find sound arguments persuasive. If they stick to their guns, there is no point in arguing with them. To do falls afoul of the folksy wisdom of a needlepoint pillow I happened upon years ago: ‘Never try to teach a pig to sing; it wastes your time and annoys the pig.’

Thrasymachus, whatever his other faults, is not this sort of skeptic. He is skeptical about the value of justice—we will soon see that he thinks it is a vice rather than a virtue—but he is not skeptical about the importance of consistency. Let us assume that Thrasymachus recognizes the argument as logically valid. (Since it wasn’t until Aristotle that

3 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1995), p. 41.

4 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Crack-Up* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 2009), p. 69.

5 Emerson, p. 41.

6 Fitzgerald, p. 69.

anyone worked out the notion of logical validity, it is anachronistic to speak of Thrasymachus as recognizing the argument's validity, but doing so seems a harmless aid to clarity.) If he wants to resist its conclusion—which presumably he does, since it says that his account of justice is false—he must think at least one of the premises is false. P1 seems unassailable: at least insofar as strength is understood in terms of political power, the law-making rulers are stronger than their subjects. P2 is never challenged by Thrasymachus or anyone else, despite Socrates' bringing it up almost half a dozen times. I cannot help but think that these are winks or gentle nudges to prod readers to look more closely at P2. Thrasymachus agrees that 'it is just to obey the rulers' (1.339b), a proposition that he repeatedly assents to: 'it is just for their subjects to do whatever their rulers order' (1.339d); 'it is just for the others to obey the orders they give' (1.339e); 'it is just to obey the orders of the rulers' (1.340a). While obeying the law is typically just, we might ask whether it is always, unconditionally, just to do so, just as Socrates questioned Cephalus' definition. Many readers will think that there is a presumption in favor of obeying the laws of our communities: obedience is the default position. But fewer will think that this presumption is exceptionless, for there seem to be times when this presumption does not hold—for example, if a law is unjust. Some thinkers, among them Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther King, go even farther and think that unjust laws are not *really* laws at all but are counterfeits, and that we should no more obey them than we should accept a \$20 bill we know to be counterfeit.

P2, as I have stated it, does not merely claim that legal obedience is just; it claims that that is what justice is. It is a subtle but important difference, apparently unnoticed but accepted by Thrasymachus. When Socrates asks him, 'And whatever laws they make must be obeyed by their subjects, and this is justice ((τὸ δίκαιον) [*to dikaion*]: the just)?', he replies 'Of course' (1.339c). By adding the definite article τὸ—'the' in English—the adjective, 'just', gets promoted to a noun, 'the just', which is a typically Platonic way to talk about justice itself. On this view, all there really is to justice is obeying the rules, regardless of their content. Justice on such a view is merely a matter of convention: there are no mind- or culture-independent facts about whether something is really just or not. The only fact that makes something just is that it is a rule of one's

community. If the laws of one's community mandate racial segregation, then justice requires obedience to them. Some readers—though fewer now than sixty years ago—will agree with this, holding that one should always obey the law, even laws one considers unjust, though one can work within the system to change unjust laws. Notice, too, that the conventionalism about justice expressed in P2 implies that there really is no standard by which to assess the laws of one's community as just or unjust. All there is to justice on such views is following whatever rules there are, regardless of their content, and there is no way to assess that content morally. Different communities have different rules, but if this deep cultural conventionalism or relativism is correct, no community's rules are better than any others, they are just different—and the same goes *within* a community over time: if a community allows slavery at time t_1 but abolishes it at t_2 , the new legal code is not better, it is just different. This is something that few people are willing to accept, upon reflection. When we associate conventionalism and relativism with open-mindedness and tolerance of other cultures' practices and norms, they can seem attractive, but they often seem significantly less so when we examine their implications.

To draw on some vocabulary developed in the previous chapter, this conventionalism about justice is an anti-realist view: there are no culture-independent moral facts by which to morally assess the laws and norms of one's culture. The contrast between nature and convention—between what is mind- and culture-independent and what is mind- and culture-dependent—is a pervasive theme in the *Republic*. The border between Illinois and Wisconsin seems purely conventional, the result of a decision to draw the line in a particular place. The border between Wisconsin and Minnesota seems more natural, since the Mississippi and St. Croix rivers are natural objects, existing whether we think they do or not. But even this boundary is not completely natural, since it is the border only because people decided it was.

We have spent a lot of time on a view no one in the *Republic* mentions because I think Plato wants us, his readers, to do what his characters do not do, to think through issues that are ignored or given short shrift in the text. If we pause and double-click here, so to speak, examining the issues more thoroughly than Socrates' interlocutors do, we will be doing philosophy for ourselves. And if we do, we might well think that P2 is

false or at least in need of serious revision, even if no one in the *Republic* questions it.

Despite Socrates' repeated prompting, Thrasymachus ignores P2. He will reject P3, which he initially assented to but now, on reflection, finds problematic. But before Thrasymachus addresses P3, Cleitophon tries to come to his rescue, suggesting that Thrasymachus' view is that justice is what the stronger *believe* to be to their advantage. In short, Cleitophon is suggesting that the Error Argument is irrelevant, since it misunderstands Thrasymachus' view. Polemarchus objects that is not what Thrasymachus said. It is telling how Socrates responds here: 'If Thrasymachus wants to put it that way now, let us accept it' (1.340c). This suggests that, contrary to what Thrasymachus says about him, Socrates is not primarily interested in winning an argument; he is interested in getting at the truth. If Cleitophon's revision more accurately reflects what Thrasymachus thinks, then that is what we should attend to, Socrates thinks. *What he meant* is more important than *what he said*, for Socrates. To think otherwise would be a foolish consistency indeed.

Thrasymachus declines to go through the door Cleitophon has opened for him, however. Instead, he does what philosophers often do: he makes a distinction between different senses of a key term or concept. Here, Thrasymachus distinguishes between the *ordinary* and *precise* senses 'ruler', claiming that P3 is true in the ordinary sense of 'ruler' but false in the precise, philosophical sense. Thus he can consistently reject the argument's conclusion, since he thinks that P3, the seemingly plausible claim that rulers sometimes err and make laws that are not to their own advantage, is false, *strictly speaking*. In the strict or precise sense, rulers do not make mistakes, he claims. 'Do you think I'd call someone who is in error stronger at the very moment he errs?' (1.340c), Thrasymachus asks.

For all his bluster and swagger, Thrasymachus shows himself capable of subtle, philosophical thought when he distinguishes between the precise and ordinary senses of terms. 'When someone makes an error in the treatment of patients', Thrasymachus asks rhetorically, 'do you call him a doctor in regard to that very error?' (1.340d) The same goes for accountants, grammarians, and any person said to possess a craft. A craftsperson, after all, possesses expertise and knowledge; the names for possessors of such expertise—carpenter, shepherd, doctor,

teacher, etc.—are not merely descriptive but are to an extent normative, indicating that their possessor has earned the right to be so called. Someone might be on the roster as quarterback or employed by the university as a teacher. But if they are so bad at their jobs, we might want to withhold the name: ‘He’s no quarterback’, says the disgruntled football fan of a now-departed player. The fan is not saying that, say, Jay Cutler did not play that position; they would be likelier to say ‘he is not a quarterback’ if the description is factually incorrect, if say the player were a linebacker and not a quarterback. Typically, ‘s/he is no *x*’, where *x* is a term for a craftsperson, makes the *normative* claim that the person in question is not good enough at their craft to merit the title. It is a normative issue, rather than a descriptive one, and it extends beyond names for craftspeople, as when someone says of rap—or rock and roll or jazz, in their early days—‘that’s not music’. This issue, by the way, is an important one in Confucianism. Confucius and especially his follower Xunzi were concerned with the ‘rectification of names (*zhengming*)’, given the importance of social roles to their thinking. Someone who regularly fails to display the required filial piety does not deserve to be called a son—or, as Thrasymachus would put it, is not a son in the precise sense.

So Thrasymachus thinks that while P3 of the Error Argument is true in the ordinary, descriptive sense of ‘ruler’, it is false in the precise, normative sense—and that is the relevant sense here. There is a certain logic to his view. Since a craftsperson is so called because they possess the requisite knowledge, when they make a mistake, they seem to lack this knowledge—or at least they are unable to act on it at that moment. ‘It is when his knowledge fails him that he makes an error’, Thrasymachus says, ‘and in regard to that error he is no craftsman. No craftsman, expert, or ruler makes an error at the moment when he is ruling, even though everyone will say that a physician or a ruler makes errors’ (1.340e). When he agreed with P3 earlier (1.339c), he had the ordinary, imprecise sense in mind. But on the precise account—and Socrates is ‘a stickler for precise accounts’ (1.340e)—P3 is false, since ‘no craftsman ever errs.’

There is certainly something to what Thrasymachus says. But is he overstating his case in holding that any error renders the craft-title in question inapplicable? Does expertise really require such infallibility?

A baseball player need not throw a perfect game in to be called *pitcher* in the precise sense. If Thrasymachus were right, there have only been twenty-three genuine pitchers in the history of major league baseball. It is not just that perfect games depend on more than the pitcher's skill. And it is not just a matter of human imperfection. Rather, it seems that some level of failure is consistent with possessing the relevant expertise, which is rarely an all-or-nothing matter. The best hitters in baseball, after all, make outs more often than they get hits. What level of imperfection is acceptable varies by craft: a batter who gets a hit only a third of the time is an excellent hitter; an orthopedic surgeon who successfully sets a broken bone for only a third of their cases seems far from competent.

Thrasymachus' distinction between the precise and ordinary senses of 'ruler' allows him to avoid accepting the conclusion that his definition of justice is false, since it allows him to claim, with some reason, that one of the argument's premises is false. Socrates does not challenge Thrasymachus' distinction between the ordinary and precise senses of 'ruler' (and, presumably, of other terms for experts in various crafts). Instead, he turns the distinction back against Thrasymachus in what we will call the Craft Argument.

The Craft Argument (1.341c–348b)

The heart of the Craft Argument is Socrates' insistence that craftspeople, in the strict sense, always seek to benefit their subjects, never themselves. Doctors, for example, insofar as they are doctors, seek to heal their patients; horse-breeders seek to raise healthy horses; etc. If we think of craft-knowledge as a kind of strength—as cognitive-practical strength rather than physical strength—then the expertise the craftsman possesses is a kind of strength; thus 'crafts rule over and are stronger than the things of which they are the craft' (1.342c). Stated in premise-conclusion form, the Craft Argument begins thus:

- P1 All crafts seek to benefit the objects over which they rule, not their practitioners.
- P2 All objects over which a craft rules are weaker than the craft, which is stronger.
- C1 So, all crafts seek to benefit the weaker, not the stronger.

The argument is valid, and though Socrates has given only a few examples in support of P1, Thrasymachus accepts it. So far, so good. Now, to get to his desired conclusion that Thrasymachus' account of justice is false, Socrates has to assume that justice is a craft; there is no way to get to a conclusion about justice without a premise about justice. Since Socrates needs to make this assumption, let us state it clearly in the second half of the Craft Argument:

- P3 Justice is a craft.
- C2 Therefore, justice seeks to benefit the weaker, not the stronger.
- C3 Therefore, justice is not the advantage of the stronger.

This half of the argument is valid, too. C2 follows from C1 and P3 by plugging 'justice' into the general claim that all crafts seek to benefit the weaker. And then C3 follows from C2, because if justice seeks to benefit the weaker, then justice is not the advantage of the stronger.

Thrasymachus' initial reaction to the conclusion is a lesson in how *not* to react rationally to an argument: 'Tell me, Socrates do you still have a wet nurse? [...] Because she is letting you run around with a snotty nose, and does not wipe it when she needs to!' (1.343a). Needless to say, such insult-ridden responses, sadly not uncommon in cyberspace, do not pass philosophical muster. And Thrasymachus' second response is not much better. For rather than challenging one of Socrates' premises, as one should do when one rejects the conclusion of a valid argument, Thrasymachus does what many of us often do: he simply repeats his view, loudly and more stridently: 'justice is really the good of another, the advantage of the stronger ruler, and harmful to the one who obeys and serves' (1.343b). His merely repeating his view rather than engaging with Socrates' objections to it echoes Polemarchus' reminder in the opening scene that one cannot be persuaded to change one's mind if one will not listen.

Thrasymachus' responding as he does is not terribly surprising when we remember his profession: he is a sophist, a wandering teacher of rhetoric, who teaches students how to make speeches in law courts. If he is any good at his job, he can teach his students to make a speech for or against any view. 'You want to argue that the defendant is guilty?

Here's how you do that. You want to argue that the defendant is innocent? Here's how you do that. You want to figure out whether the defendant is really guilty or not? Not my department.' He is a master of the art of disputation, engaging in what Plato calls *eristic*, the etymology of which is telling: *Eris* was the Greek goddess of strife; but for her rolling an apple engraved 'to the fairest' at a divine wedding reception, the Trojan War might not have happened. To be ἐριστικός (*eristikos*) is to be fond of strife, to enjoy combat—at least the verbal variety. However effective good speeches are at persuading one's listeners of pre-determined conclusions, they are not especially effective for arriving at philosophical conclusions. Socrates thinks his method of *elenchus*, the method of question-and-answer that proceeds from premises his interlocutor agrees to, is a better way to get at the truth. Now if you already know—or, like Thrasymachus, think you know—the truth about an issue, a rhetorically sound speech (or op-ed piece or book) may be the best way to bring your audience around to your view. But if, like Socrates, you do not think you know the answer to the question, Socratic cross-examination seems a better way to get at the truth, whatever it will turn out to be. 'Whatever direction the argument blows us', Socrates says a bit later in the *Republic*, 'that is where we must go' (3.394d). Where Thrasymachus draws on his rhetorical skills to get to that pre-determined end, Socrates will accept 'the [answer] that seems right to me after I have investigated the matter' (1.337c). This difference between their approaches is ultimately the difference between indoctrination and inquiry.

It is a shame that Thrasymachus is unwilling or unable to query Socrates' argument, for it is not as airtight as Socrates seems to think it is. As is often the case in the *Republic*, we will have to do for one of the interlocutors what they cannot or will not do for themselves. For starters, Thrasymachus might question P1, the claim that all crafts seek to benefit their objects, not their practitioners. The trouble here is not that the argument Socrates gave in support of P1 is too brief, although it is that. From just a few examples of crafts that aim at the benefit of their objects rather than their practitioners, Socrates arrives at a general conclusion that all crafts are like this. Perhaps more examples would strengthen this inductive argument.

A more serious problem with the Craft Argument is that Socrates himself provides a counterexample to its first premise when he introduces ‘the craft of wage-earning’ (1.346c). Crafts are distinguished by their different ends and their different means for achieving their ends—that is, by their different functions: ‘every craft differ[s] from every other in having a different function’ (1.346a). The function of a doctor, *in the precise sense*, is healing patients, not making money. And similarly for the other crafts Socrates lists: navigation, horse-breeding, etc. Making money is the function of a different craft, the craft of wage-earning or money-making. If doctors and horse-breeders and ship-captains and teachers benefit financially from practicing their crafts, it is because they possess another craft, the craft of wage-earning. Many readers will be familiar with chefs and carpenters and doctors who are truly expert at their crafts but who lack business sense. At the other end of the spectrum are those ‘famous for being famous’ celebrities whose only discernible skill is money-making, an ability to monetize their otherwise-devoid-of-accomplishment existences. By now the point is probably obvious: the craft of money-making is practiced for the benefit of the practitioner. While medicine and teaching are other-focused, wage-earning is self-focused: it benefits the craftsman. And it is true that you might practice this craft altruistically, as when you want to earn more money so you can better provide for your family or community, but the craft itself aims to benefit the craftsman.

So right off the bat, Thrasymachus has grounds to resist the conclusion that his definition is false. Of course, the conclusion of an unsound argument might still be true. Just as there is nothing inconsistent about a juror thinking the defendant actually committed the crime in question but voting to acquit because the state did not prove its case beyond a reasonable doubt, there is nothing inconsistent in believing that the conclusion of an unsound or invalid argument is true. If Thrasymachus were more fair-minded, he might concede that his definition of justice might *be* false but insist that Socrates has not *shown* that it is.

Another and perhaps better option for Thrasymachus is to cast doubt on P3, the claim that justice is a craft. As noted above, this is an implicit assumption of the argument, not an explicit claim—though Socrates did assert it earlier, in arguing against Polemarchus: ‘what does the craft we call justice give, and to whom or what does it give it?’ (1.332d) This

would be a good move for Thrasymachus to make, since we already have good reason to think that P3 is false: while crafts and character virtues are similar in many ways, crafts are morally neutral whereas character virtues are not. If justice is not a craft, then the general claim that crafts are other-focused would not apply to it. Now it looks like the argument is doubly unsound, since we have good reason to doubt both P1 and P3, so Thrasymachus is not rationally compelled to accept its conclusion. Socrates might reply that even if justice is not a craft, ruling is. But then the Craft Argument's conclusion needs to be changed as well, which stymies Socrates' attempt to make progress toward understanding what *justice* is by showing what it is not. The argument so modified would not be a refutation of Thrasymachus' definition of justice but rather of the view that rulers, in the precise sense, seek not their own benefit but rather the benefit of those they rule. We might think this is true, at least of *good* rulers, but Thrasymachus could here raise the problems with P1, reminding Socrates that his own example of wage-earning is a counterexample to the general claim that crafts are not practiced primarily for the benefit of the craftsperson. Why not think ruling is analogous to wage-earning, Thrasymachus could ask, and aims at the benefit of the ruler? At the very least, Socrates has not given him compelling reasons to think that it is not.

An important lesson here is how interlinked the arguments of the *Republic* are. Earlier I suggested that the important conclusion to draw from Socrates' attempted refutation of Polemarchus was not the one he explicitly drew but rather that justice and other moral virtues are not crafts. Whether this was the lesson Plato hoped we'd learn is beside the point, at least to the extent that one goal in reading the *Republic* is to do philosophy ourselves, to engage in imaginary dialogue with Socrates as we try to get at or at least close to the truth of the matter. If the assumption that justice is a craft is false, its reappearing as a premise here undermines the Craft Argument.

The Outdoing Argument (1.348b–350d)

Even if the Craft Argument is unsound, it explicitly raises the *Republic's* second main question of whether the just life is happier than the unjust life. This question's urgency leads Socrates to leap-frog the more

theoretical question of the nature of justice in favor of the practical question of ‘which whole way of life would make living most worthwhile for each of us’ (1.344e).

Modern moral philosophy often focuses on particular actions, especially choices in dilemmas. Sometimes the dilemmas are intentionally artificial, to bring out larger moral principles lurking in the background. Many readers will be familiar with ‘the trolley problem’ and its numerous variations: is it permissible to divert a runaway trolley car onto a track where it will kill one worker if doing so will save five people working on the track the trolley is on? Other times, the dilemmas are more the stuff of everyday life: is aborting a pre-viability fetus permissible or not? Socrates’ question is far more general than these, as it concerns *whole ways of life* rather than particular actions. It concerns not so much what we ought to do as ‘the way we ought to live’ (1.352d). Socrates’ approach focuses on persons rather than actions and takes the unit of evaluation to be lives rather than choices and actions. This approach, known as Virtue Ethics, has enjoyed a resurgence among moral philosophers in recent years, and though virtue ethicists often look to Aristotle for inspiration, we see its roots in the ethical thought of Plato and Socrates. This virtue-centric concern comes to the fore almost immediately in the third of Socrates’ arguments against Thrasymachus, the Outdoing Argument, to which we now turn.

Since Socrates has shifted his attention from the first to the second of the *Republic*’s main questions, his aim now is not to refute Thrasymachus’ definition of justice but rather Thrasymachus’ claim that ‘complete injustice is more profitable than complete justice’ (1.348c). The question of whether a just life is happier than an unjust one has great practical implications, given the overwhelmingly plausible assumption that each of us wants to be happy. Few of us would dispute that the just life is *morally* better than the unjust life; the issue here is whether the just life is *prudentially* better—whether, as we put it in the Introduction, having a good life requires leading a good life. Thrasymachus thinks not, since ‘a just man always gets less than an unjust one’ (1.343d). If Thrasymachus is right about which life is happier, then each of us has a strong reason to act unjustly: if a just or morally good life is always at odds with happiness, living a just life will inevitably frustrate a core desire each of us has. Socrates argues that, despite its apparent plausibility, Thrasymachus’

view is profoundly mistaken, since morality and happiness are *not* fundamentally at odds with each other. Far from being an impediment to happiness, a just life is at least a necessary condition of a happy life, on Socrates' view, since we cannot be happy unless we are just.

Thrasymachus understands happiness in terms of material success, in terms of power and its trappings. On his view, the more a person *gets*, the happier they will be. Life is a competition between people striving to outdo each other where the winner is the person who is able to bend others to their will. Few people, I trust, try to inculcate Thrasymachus' materialism and egoism in their children. Socrates' last words, nearly, to the jury that found him guilty of impiety and sentenced him to death, are a request for a favor:

When my sons grow up, gentlemen, if you think they are putting money or anything else before goodness, take your revenge by plaguing them as I have plagued you; and if they fancy themselves for no reason, you must scold them as I scolded you, for neglecting the important things and thinking they are good for something when they are good for nothing. If you do this, I shall have had justice at your hands, both I myself and my children.⁷

Despite his profound disagreement with Thrasymachus' materialistic conception of human flourishing, Socrates does not argue *directly* against it but instead, in a pattern that by now is familiar, he tries to show Thrasymachus that a key premise he believes in—here, that the unjust person 'outdoes everyone else' (1.344a)—does not support and in fact is at odds with the conclusion Thrasymachus holds.

This notion of *outdoing* is central to the Outdoing Argument. The Greek word is *πλεονεξία* (*pleonexia*); etymologically it is a combination of *pleon* (more) and *echein* (to have). Thrasymachus' unjust person wants to have more than anyone else and recognizes no legitimate moral constraints on his pursuit of his goal. Fans of classic cinema will find a fine example of *pleonexia* in John Huston's 1948 film, *Key Largo*, starring Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, and Edward G. Robinson. In a confrontation between Frank McCloud (Bogart) and Johnny Rocco

⁷ Plato: *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo*, trans. by G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1981), p. 44 (41e–42a).

(Robinson), McCloud tells captive innkeeper James Temple (Lionel Barrymore), that he knows what Rocco wants:

McCloud: He wants more, don't you, Rocco?
 Rocco: Yeah. That's it. More. That's right! I want more!
 Temple: Will you ever get enough?
 McCloud: Will you, Rocco?
 Rocco: Well, I never have. No, I guess I won't. You, do you know what you want?
 McCloud: Yes, I had hopes once, but I gave them up.
 Rocco: Hopes for what?
 McCloud: A world in which there is no place for Johnny Rocco.⁸

Rocco's insatiable desire for more is the heart of *pleonexia*. It is almost as though the object of this desire is secondary: whatever people want, the pleonectic person wants more of it, wants to outdo everyone else. The rest of us, not strong enough to bend others to our wills to get what we want, live in fear of the Johnny Roccas of the world, those amoral creatures who are strong enough to bend us to their will to get what they want. Glaucon, playing devil's advocate, will soon articulate the Thrasymachan view that justice is a deal the weak make to protect themselves against the caprice of the stronger. 'Those who reproach injustice', Thrasymachus says, do so not because they are afraid of doing it but of suffering it' (1.344c). If enough of us weak folk band together and gain political power, we can make laws that protect us against the Thrasymachuses and Roccas of the world. After all, that is all justice is, in the conventionalist view Thrasymachus articulated at the outset: the rules the politically powerful make to serve their own interests.

We should note, though, that Thrasymachus shifts gears at the outset of the Outdoing Argument and articulates a view that does not square with his conventionalism. For he counts injustice not as a vice but as a virtue:

Socrates: Do you call one of the two a virtue and the other a vice?

8 *Key Largo*, dir. by John Huston, prod. by Jerry Wald (Warner Bros., 1948).

- Thrasymachus: Of course.
- Socrates: That is to say, you call justice a virtue and injustice a vice?
- Thrasymachus: That is hardly likely, since I say that injustice is profitable and justice is not...
- Socrates: Do you really include injustice with virtue and wisdom, and justice with their opposites?
- Thrasymachus: I certainly do. (1.348c–e)

Thrasymachus is here articulating *immoralism*, the view that what most people think of as the wrong way to act is actually the right way: what are conventionally thought to be character vices are actually virtues. Unlike the conventionalism Thrasymachus expressed earlier, immoralism is a realist view: there are mind-independent moral facts that provide standards by which to evaluate a society's conventions and norms. Athenian culture takes justice to be a virtue and injustice to be a vice. Here, Thrasymachus is saying that Athenian culture get this backwards, since injustice is really the virtue and justice the vice.

Thrasymachus' immoralism makes sense when we pair the last chapter's discussion of what a virtue is with his materialistic conception of human flourishing. A virtue is the condition that enables a thing to perform its function well. So a knife's virtue is sharpness, since that is what enables the knife to cut well. If our function is to outdo others, to get more stuff, then of course injustice is a virtue and justice is a vice, since injustice enables and justice prevents our getting more than others: 'a just man always gets less than an unjust one' (1.343d).

Socrates notices the challenge posed by Thrasymachus' shift to immoralism: 'it is not easy to know what to say' (1.348e) in light of Thrasymachus' jettisoning the moral order that would usually serve as the background of a conversation like this. But he cannot simply presuppose the usual background without begging the question—that is, without assuming the truth of what he is trying to prove—against Thrasymachus: he needs to *argue* against Thrasymachus' immoralism, not just *assume* it is wrong and that the traditional moral order, on which justice is a virtue and injustice a vice, is correct. Socrates' direct target in the Outdoing Argument is Thrasymachus' immoralist view that justice is the vice and injustice is the virtue; if he can show this, he will knock

out the support for Thrasymachus' view that the unjust life is happier than the just life.

Thrasymachus thinks that an unjust person tries to outdo everyone—and if they are sufficiently good at being bad, they will succeed. He thinks that the just person, by contrast, is a simpleton, easily duped by the more crafty and complicated unjust person. Socrates gets Thrasymachus to agree that the just person seeks to outdo only unjust people, but Thrasymachus is skeptical that the person will succeed at this, being so 'polite and innocent' (1.349b). Socrates once again appeals to the analogy between crafts and virtues: a craftsperson, he argues, tries to outperform the person lacking the craft in question, while the craft-lacking person tries to outdo everyone. Thrasymachus agrees to this, and also to Socrates' claim that a craftsperson is wise and good, which makes sense at least with respect to the craft in question. A skilled carpenter possesses a kind of technical wisdom, knowing how to build a wrap-around deck or a roll-top desk, for example. The person who lacks the craft, by contrast, is ignorant and bad: they lack the craftsperson's knowledge and are not, for example, a good carpenter—they are not properly called a carpenter at all, if Thrasymachus' earlier point about the precise sense of craft-terms is correct. The craftsperson, Socrates thinks, wants to perform the craft in question better than someone who lacks it, not someone who possesses it: they want to outdo those unlike them, not those like them. The craft-lacking person, by contrast, wants to outperform everyone, both those like them and those unlike them. Similarly, the just person wants to outdo unjust people, those unlike them, while the unjust person wants to outdo everyone, both those like and those unlike them.

If all of this is correct, the just person resembles the craftsperson, since each wants to outdo only those unlike them, the unjust and craft-lacking person, while the unjust person resembles the craft-lacking person, wanting to outdo everyone, both those unlike them and those like them. Since 'each of them has the qualities of the people he is like' (1.349d) and Thrasymachus has agreed that the craftsperson is good and wise, while the craft-lacking person is neither, it follows that the just person is good and wise while the unjust person is neither; from there it is a short trip to the conclusion that 'justice is virtue and wisdom and that injustice is vice and ignorance' (1.350d).

Since most of us, I assume, are not immoralists, we will agree with Socrates' conclusion. But as often is the case in Book I, Socrates' argument for his conclusion is problematic. The first problem is that the argument relies on the analogy between crafts and virtues, a troublesome analogy that bedevils much of Book I. Given the difference between character virtues and crafts—the latter are morally neutral while the former are not—why should Thrasymachus accept the claim that 'each has the qualities of the one he resembles' (1.350c)? After all, the kinds of knowledge the just and skilled persons require are very different. In possessing a skill, the craftsperson possesses a morally neutral knowledge of how to do certain things. As Socrates noted in his argument with Polemarchus, the craftsperson can use their skills for good or ill: a doctor can use their medical expertise to heal or kill. Even someone who possesses a skill that seems intrinsically bad—imagine, say, an assassin—can use that skill for good ends as well as bad: assassinating Hitler seems a good thing. The lesson here is that arguments from analogy rise and fall on the presence of relevant similarities and dissimilarities, respectively, between the things being compared. Given the important dissimilarity between crafts and virtues, Thrasymachus would be right to push back on this premise.

Another problem with the Outdoing Argument, which many readers will have already noticed, is that its very first premise, the claim that the skilled person seeks to outdo only the unskilled person rather than another skilled person, seems to be not merely false but obviously false. Socrates is probably correct that when it comes to *tuning* the lyre, the lyre-player wants to do better than a non-musician. Where there is one correct way to do something, genuine experts will do that thing in the same way. But when it comes to *playing* the lyre, for example, rather than merely *tuning* it, a skilled musician does not merely want to play better than a non-musician—that is not much of an achievement—they want to outperform another lyre-player. Readers might be puzzled by Socrates' confident assertion that 'a doctor [...] when prescribing food and drink [...] want[s] to outdo a nondoctor' (1.350a), given how competitive doctors can be. Some doctors are better diagnosticians than others, some cellists are better at playing Bach than others, some philosophers are better at interpreting Plato than others, some investors are better at spotting under-valued companies than others, etc. Developing these

skills is often fueled at least in part by competition and a desire to outperform—to outdo, as Socrates puts it—other experts: the desire to be the best at *x*-ing, whatever *x* may be.

So even setting aside the *disanalogy* between crafts and virtues, the Outdoing Argument flounders because its key premise is false or at least highly questionable; at the very least, it needs more defense than it gets.

Even if we agree with Socrates that Thrasymachus' immoralism is mistaken, we can see that the Outdoing Argument is far from conclusive against it. Perhaps a lesson here is that being too personally invested in one's views, as Thrasymachus seems to be, can get in the way of adequately defending them. If I see your argument as refuting *me* rather than refuting a view I hold, as attacking me as a person rather than a premise or principle I subscribe to, I may well react as Thrasymachus does. Earlier he responded to the Error Argument with a literally snotty put-down of Socrates; here he is tamer in defeat, blushing and producing 'a quantity of sweat that was a wonder to behold' (1.350d). But clearly a more dispassionate attitude would serve him better. After all, if the goal is to discover the truth about justice, seeing that one's view was mistaken is actually something to welcome, since by clearing away false views we get closer to the truth. Such an attitude is a tall order for most of us, but even if we think it is not fully achievable, given human nature, it does present an ideal to which we can aspire.

The Common Purpose Argument (1.350d–352d)

There is a discernible change in Thrasymachus' demeanor after the Outdoing Argument, one noted by Glaucon towards the beginning of Book II: 'I think that Thrasymachus gave up before he had to, charmed by you as if he were a snake' (2.358b). Thrasymachus thinks his immoralism, a view he regarded as bold and daring, has been refuted, and since speech-making has been ruled out, he announces that he will just agree with Socrates from here on. In again urging Thrasymachus not to answer 'contrary to his own opinion' (1.350c), Socrates reminds us of the nature of Socratic cross-examination, which is personal in the sense of its aiming to help the person being questioned to discover the truth by examining how well their views hang together or if they hang

together at all. Especially when the topic is an important one like justice, being in error can have disastrous consequences. In the conclusion of Book I of his *Treatise of Human Nature* David Hume famously said, 'Generally speaking, the errors in religion are dangerous; those in philosophy only ridiculous'.⁹ Socrates could not disagree more, since so much hangs on the philosophical question of whether the just life is happier than the unjust life. (Hume, in response, would think that philosophical questions have far less effect on how we live our lives than Socrates thinks; far from being able to govern our conduct, 'reason is and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any office than to serve and obey them'.¹⁰) If Thrasymachus is mistaken that the unjust life is a happier life, this mistake is not merely theoretical or conceptual or abstractly philosophical, for 'the argument concerns no ordinary topic but the way we ought to live' (1.352d); it is a mistake that will have profound implications for the quality of one's life. If Socrates is right about justice, then Thrasymachus' view is a prescription for a life of glittering misery.

So it is a shame that Thrasymachus gives up, for the final two arguments of Book I deserve more scrutiny than they get. The first of these is the Common Purpose Argument, which aims to refute Thrasymachus' claim that 'injustice is stronger and more powerful than justice' (1.351a). This claim is implied by the immoralist view that Socrates tried to refute with the Outdoing Argument. Thrasymachus thinks that injustice empowers its possessor to outdo everyone, to take control of and rule a city-state. Socrates argues that Thrasymachus has woefully misidentified injustice's power: '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' (1.351e).

Socrates' idea is that even a criminal gang cannot successfully achieve its goals unless some kind of justice regulates the gangsters' dealings with each other. Spelled out in premise-conclusion form, the Common Purpose Argument goes something like this:

9 David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, ed. by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed., rev. by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 272 [Book I, Part iv, Section 7].

10 Hume, *Treatise*, p. 415 [II.iii.3].

- P1 If x enables successful common action and y prevents this, then x is stronger than y .
- P2 Justice enables and injustice prevents successful common action.
- C Therefore, justice is stronger than injustice.

The argument is logically valid—its conclusion must be true if its premises are true—and its premises seem in fact true, so it is sound, to boot. As the preceding arguments have all been problematic, this success almost seems worth celebrating. But before Socrates and company start with the ancient Athenian equivalent of high-fiving, they would do well to pause and note that even if the argument is sound, the conclusion it establishes seems too weak, for it shows that justice is merely instrumentally good, useful for any group to achieve its goals, be they just or unjust. Socrates thinks that justice (and especially a reputation for possessing it) is instrumentally good, but presumably he wants to show that justice is also intrinsically good—that its goodness is internal and not dependent merely on the external benefits it brings about, that all by itself it makes its possessor better off. If justice helps a criminal enterprise be more unjust, then it is hard to see how it is a moral virtue; instead, it seems to be just another skill or craft and merely conditionally good: it is good when aimed at good ends and bad when aimed at bad ends.

So even though the Common Purpose Argument is sound, it does not seem to prove what it ought to prove. It is a shame that Thrasymachus' wounded pride prevents him from challenging the Common Purpose Argument. If he had, Socrates might have given it up, or perhaps on reflection he might have regrouped and responded that the argument shows at least that Thrasymachus' immoralism is incorrect. After all, Thrasymachus thinks injustice is a virtue and justice is a vice because the former enables and the latter prevents its possessor from achieving happiness: immoralism implies that injustice is stronger than justice. So in showing that the opposite is true, that justice is stronger than injustice, Socrates shows that immoralism is false. So even if the Common Purpose Argument comes to the wrong conclusion about the nature of justice, it still packs a punch against Thrasymachus' immoralism.

The Function Argument (1.352d–354c)

The last argument in Book I reprises and repurposes some concepts employed earlier in Book I and discussed in the last chapter, especially the nature of a virtue. Socrates seems to regard it as a knock-down argument that the just life is happier than the unjust life, but we will see that even he is ultimately dissatisfied with it.

The ideas of *virtue* and *function* came up earlier in Book I, in one of Socrates' arguments against Polemarchus' view that justice is helping friends and harming enemies. A thing's function is its goal-directed purpose, the activity characteristic of things of its kind. So a knife's function is cutting, a heart's function is pumping blood, etc. Socrates 'define[s] the function of a horse or anything else as that which one can do only with it or best with it' (1.352e). So even though one can cut with a spoon or a fingernail, cutting is a knife's function since a knife cuts best. A virtue, we have seen, is what enables a thing to perform its function well: 'anything that has a function performs it well by means of its own peculiar virtue and badly by means of its vice' (1.353c). Thus a knife's virtue is sharpness, because sharpness enables a knife to cut well. Since we make knives and other tools to perform certain tasks, it is easy to see an artifact's function and virtue. But natural objects like hearts, eyes, and kidneys, have functions, too. And indeed, in the Function Argument, Socrates is concerned about the function and virtue of the soul (ψυχή [*psuchê*], whence the word 'psyche' (the upsilon is often transliterated as a 'y', so *psuchê* becomes *psyche*, for example)). Though Socrates will later argue that the soul is immortal, it is best not to read any religious beliefs into 'soul' here. Instead, think of a soul as a life-force. All living things have souls on this view. Indeed, Aristotle will distinguish between vegetative souls, which enable metabolic processes, sentient souls, which enable feeling and locomotion, and rational souls, which enable thought. Humans, he thinks, have all three, and non-human animals have the first two. Thus Socrates asks, 'What of living? Is not that a function of a soul?' (1.353d) He then claims, and Thrasymachus half-heartedly agrees, that 'justice is a soul's virtue and injustice its vice' (1.353e). He made this claim earlier, in the argument

with Polemarchus: ‘But is not justice human virtue?’ (1.335c). Just as a sharp knife cuts well, a just soul lives well. And what is happiness but living well? Thus Socrates concludes that ‘a just person is happy, and an unjust one is wretched’ (1.354a). Spelled out in premise-conclusion form, the Function Argument looks like this:

- P1 A thing’s virtue enables its function to be performed well. (1.353c)
- P2 Living is a function of the soul. (1.353d)
- P3 Justice is a soul’s virtue, injustice a vice. (1.353e)
- C1 So, the just person lives well; the unjust person lives poorly. (1.353e)
- P4 Happiness is living well; unhappiness is living poorly. (1.354a)
- C2 So, the just person is happy; the unjust person is unhappy. (1.354a)

The argument is logically well constructed: if its premises are true its conclusions must be true. But even if we agree with Socrates that its premises are true, we might wish that Thrasymachus would push back a bit, for it is not clear that we are justified in thinking them true.

P1 is unproblematic: it is just a definition of what a virtue or excellence is. But we might worry that P2 is weaker than it needs to be: living needs to be *the* function of the soul, not merely *a* function of the soul, for the argument to work. While one cannot be just—or unjust, for that matter—if one is not alive, it is hard to see how mere biological life is the issue here. A deeper worry is P3, which Thrasymachus is already on record as rejecting: on his immoralist view, injustice is the virtue and justice the vice. While we might agree that Socrates was right to reject Thrasymachus’ immoralism, if we are fair-minded we should concede that his argument for doing so leaves much to be desired, relying on both a false equivalence between skills and virtues and on the false premise that the skilled person seeks to outdo only the unskilled person. The Common Purpose Argument gives an indirect reason for thinking P3 is true and thus that Thrasymachus’ immoralism is false, but it is overly dependent on the bad analogy between skills and virtues. What Thrasymachus should do, but does not do, is to push back and argue that Socrates may well be correct that the just life is happier, but the Function Argument does not prove it, since two of its key premises may

well be false and at the very least Socrates has not given us reasons for thinking they are true. Book I would be very different if Thrasymachus gave Socrates more of a run for his money.

Socrates himself is dissatisfied at the end of Book I, and he seems to implicitly acknowledge that his arguments—especially the last one—rely on premises that Thrasymachus finds doubtful and that even sympathetic but fair-minded readers wish were better supported. Moreover, Socrates recognizes a flaw in his procedure: he started to address the *Republic's* second question of which life is happier before answering the first question on the nature of justice. It is a moment of typical Socratic insight: 'the result of the discussion, as far as I am concerned, is that I know nothing, for when I do not know what justice is, I will hardly know whether it is a kind of virtue or not, or whether a person who has it is happy or unhappy' (1.354c).

So Socrates himself realizes that he is not really justified in asserting the Function Argument's key premise, P3. It is not that he thinks it is false; he has not gone over to Thrasymachan immoralism. But he recognizes that he has not given the immoralist a good reason to change their mind, and he has not given himself a good reason to believe what he believes.

Several years ago, Donald Rumsfeld's talk of 'the known unknown' was held up to some ridicule or at least befuddlement in the popular media. But one need not approve of Rumsfeld's role in the Second Gulf War to appreciate the essentially Socratic nature of the point he was making. There are things that we know, and we know that we know them: our names, where we live, etc. And there are things that many of us do not know—what the capital of Belarus is, Ted Williams' lifetime batting average, how to play the cello—and we probably know that we do not know them. But it is those things that we do not even know that we do not know that can be a source of trouble, as any student who discovers, during an exam, that they now know that they do not know something... Had they come to this higher-order awareness before the exam, they could have asked their professor or a classmate for help. As is so often the case in other areas of life, timing is everything in moving from not knowing that we do not know something to knowing that we do not know it.

Coming to this kind of higher-order knowledge is often an epiphany; it certainly was for Socrates when he realized that his wisdom consisted in his not thinking he knew what he did not know—in his knowing what he did not know (*Apology* 20d–21e). And the same goes at the end of Book I, when he realizes that he does not yet know what justice is, and thus that the arguments he is given that the just life is happier rely on premises he is really not entitled to assert. He is displaying a kind of intellectual humility that is sadly in short supply in our age (as it was in his). Even if his interlocutors have not challenged him when they could have and should have, Socrates does not let himself get away with thinking he knows something he does not know.

While Book I ends on a down-note, we will see in the next chapter that there is reason yet for optimism.

Some Suggestions for Further Reading

For an excellent discussion of the notion of virtue, interested readers should see Heather Battaly, *Virtue* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015).

Readers interested in Confucius' views on the strict senses of terms will find them in Book 13, chapter 3 of his *Analects*. *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, trans. by Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998) is excellent and includes a very helpful introduction. The later Confucian Xunzi (aka Hsun Tzu) explores the issue in greater depth in chapter 22 of the text that bears his name. Interested readers should see *Xunzi: The Complete Text*, trans. by Eric Hutton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt6wq19b>

Readers interested in the historical Thrasymachus will find fragments of his work in *The Greek Sophists*, ed. by J. Dillon and T. Gergel (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).

There are many discussions of Socrates' encounter with Thrasymachus. An excellent one to start with is Roslyn Weiss, 'Wise Guys and Smart Alecks in *Republic* 1 and 2', in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's 'Republic'*, ed. by G. Ferrari (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 90–115, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ccol0521839637.004>

Readers interested in relativism might start with chapters two and three of James Rachels and Stuart Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 8th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2014).

Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on Law*, trans. by Richard J. Regan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2000), is the *locus classicus* for the view that unjust laws are not really laws; interested readers will also want to see Martin Luther King Jr., 'Letter from Birmingham Jail', in *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Signet Classics, 2000), pp. 76–95, for a modern application of that view.

Readers interested in a scholarly treatment of Socrates' method might start with Gregory Vlastos, 'The Socratic *elenchus*—Method Is All', in Vlastos, *Socratic Studies*, ed. by Myles Burnyeat (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 1–29.

For readers intrigued by the concept of irony, there is no better place to begin than the first chapter of Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 21–44.

