It’s impossible.

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

It does.

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

We did.

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

Apparently so, according to your argument.

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

Of course.

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

So be it.

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

Of course.

And so, Thrasymachus, injustice is never more profitable than justice. Let that be your banquet, Socrates, at the feast of Bendis.

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

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

**Book II**

When I said this, I thought I had done with the discussion, but it turned out to have been only a prelude. Glaucon showed his characteristic courage on this occasion too and refused to accept Thrasymachus’ abandonment of the argument. Socrates, he said, do you want to seem to have persuaded us that it is better in every way to be just than unjust, or do you want truly to convince us of this?

I want truly to convince you, I said, if I can.

Well, then, you certainly aren’t doing what you want. Tell me, do you think there is a kind of good we welcome, not because we desire what comes from it, but because we welcome it for its own sake—joy, for example, and all the harmless pleasures that have no results beyond the joy of having them?
Certainly, I think there are such things.

And is there a kind of good we like for its own sake and also for the sake of what comes from it—knowing, for example, and seeing and being healthy? We welcome such things, I suppose, on both counts.

Yes.

And do you also see a third kind of good, such as physical training, medical treatment when sick, medicine itself, and the other ways of making money? We’d say that these are onerous but beneficial to us, and we wouldn’t choose them for their own sakes, but for the sake of the rewards and other things that come from them.

There is also this third kind. But what of it?

Where do you put justice?

I myself put it among the finest goods, as something to be valued by anyone who is going to be blessed with happiness, both because of itself and because of what comes from it.

That isn’t most people’s opinion. They’d say that justice belongs to the onerous kind, and is to be practiced for the sake of the rewards and popularity that come from a reputation for justice, but is to be avoided because of itself as something burdensome.

I know that’s the general opinion. Thrasymachus faulted justice on these grounds a moment ago and praised injustice, but it seems that I’m a slow learner.

Come, then, and listen to me as well, and see whether you still have that problem, for I think that Thrasymachus gave up before he had to, charmed by you as if he were a snake. But I’m not yet satisfied by the argument on either side. I want to know what justice and injustice are and what power each itself has when it’s by itself in the soul. I want to leave out of account their rewards and what comes from each of them. So, if you agree, I’ll renew the argument of Thrasymachus. First, I’ll state what kind of thing people consider justice to be and what its origins are. Second, I’ll argue that all who practice it do so unwillingly, as something necessary, not as something good. Third, I’ll argue that they have good reason to act as they do, for the life of an unjust person is, they say, much better than that of a just one.

It isn’t, Socrates, that I believe any of that myself. I’m perplexed, indeed, and my ears are deafened listening to Thrasymachus and countless others. But I’ve yet to hear anyone defend justice in the way I want, proving that it is better than injustice. I want to hear it praised by itself, and I think that I’m most likely to hear this from you. Therefore, I’m going to speak at length in praise of the unjust life, and in doing so I’ll show you the way I want to hear you praising justice and denouncing injustice. But see whether you want me to do that or not.

I want that most of all. Indeed, what subject could someone with any understanding enjoy discussing more often?

Excellent. Then let’s discuss the first subject I mentioned—what justice is and what its origins are.
They say that to do injustice is naturally good and to suffer injustice bad, but that the badness of suffering it so far exceeds the goodness of doing it that those who have done and suffered injustice and tasted both, but who lack the power to do it and avoid suffering it, decide that it is profitable to come to an agreement with each other neither to do injustice nor to suffer it. As a result, they begin to make laws and covenants, and what the law commands they call lawful and just. This, they say, is the origin and essence of justice. It is intermediate between the best and the worst. The best is to do injustice without paying the penalty; the worst is to suffer it without being able to take revenge. Justice is a mean between these two extremes. People value it not as a good but because they are too weak to do injustice with impunity. Someone who has the power to do this, however, and is a true man wouldn’t make an agreement with anyone not to do injustice in order not to suffer it. For him that would be madness. This is the nature of justice, according to the argument, Socrates, and these are its natural origins.

We can see most clearly that those who practice justice do it unwillingly and because they lack the power to do injustice, if in our thoughts we grant to a just and an unjust person the freedom to do whatever they like. We can then follow both of them and see where their desires would lead. And we’ll catch the just person red-handed travelling the same road as the unjust. The reason for this is the desire to outdo others and get more and more. This is what anyone’s nature naturally pursues as good, but nature is forced by law into the perversion of treating fairness with respect.

The freedom I mentioned would be most easily realized if both people had the power they say the ancestor of Gyges of Lydia possessed. The story goes that he was a shepherd in the service of the ruler of Lydia. There was a violent thunderstorm, and an earthquake broke open the ground and created a chasm at the place where he was tending his sheep. Seeing this, he was filled with amazement and went down into it. And there, in addition to many other wonders of which we’re told, he saw a hollow bronze horse. There were windowlike openings in it, and, peeping in, he saw a corpse, which seemed to be of more than human size, wearing nothing but a gold ring on its finger. He took the ring and came out of the chasm. He wore the ring at the usual monthly meeting that reported to the king on the state of the flocks. And as he was sitting among the others, he happened to turn the setting of the ring towards himself to the inside of his hand. When he did this, he became invisible to those sitting near him, and they went on talking as if he had gone. He wondered at this, and, fingering the ring, he turned the setting outwards again and became visible. So he experimented with the ring to test whether it indeed had this power—and it did. If he turned the setting inward, he became invisible; if he turned it outward, he became visible again. When he realized this, he at once arranged to become one of the messengers sent to report to the king. And when he arrived there, he seduced the king’s wife, attacked the king with her help, killed him, and took over the kingdom.
Let’s suppose, then, that there were two such rings, one worn by a just and the other by an unjust person. Now, no one, it seems, would be so incorruptible that he would stay on the path of justice or stay away from other people’s property, when he could take whatever he wanted from the marketplace with impunity, go into people’s houses and have sex with anyone he wished, kill or release from prison anyone he wished, and do all the other things that would make him like a god among humans. Rather his actions would be in no way different from those of an unjust person, and both would follow the same path. This, some would say, is a great proof that one is never just willingly but only when compelled to be. No one believes justice to be a good when it is kept private, since, wherever either person thinks he can do injustice with impunity, he does it. Indeed, every man believes that injustice is far more profitable to himself than justice. And any exponent of this argument will say he’s right, for someone who didn’t want to do injustice, given this sort of opportunity, and who didn’t touch other people’s property would be thought wretched and stupid by everyone aware of the situation, though, of course, they’d praise him in public, deceiving each other for fear of suffering injustice. So much for my second topic.

As for the choice between the lives we’re discussing, we’ll be able to make a correct judgment about that only if we separate the most just and the most unjust. Otherwise we won’t be able to do it. Here’s the separation I have in mind. We’ll subtract nothing from the injustice of an unjust person and nothing from the justice of a just one, but we’ll take each to be complete in his own way of life. First, therefore, we must suppose that an unjust person will act as clever craftsmen do: A first-rate captain or doctor, for example, knows the difference between what his craft can and can’t do. He attempts the first but lets the second go by, and if he happens to slip, he can put things right. In the same way, an unjust person’s successful attempts at injustice must remain undetected, if he is to be fully unjust. Anyone who is caught should be thought inept, for the extreme of injustice is to be believed to be just without being just. And our completely unjust person must be given complete injustice; nothing may be subtracted from it. We must allow that, while doing the greatest injustice, he has nonetheless provided himself with the greatest reputation for justice. If he happens to make a slip, he must be able to put it right. If any of his unjust activities should be discovered, he must be able to speak persuasively or to use force. And if force is needed, he must have the help of courage and strength and of the substantial wealth and friends with which he has provided himself.

Having hypothesized such a person, let’s now in our argument put beside him a just man, who is simple and noble and who, as Aeschylus says, doesn’t want to be believed to be good but to be so.¹ We must take

¹. In Seven Against Thebes, 592–94, it is said of Amphiarus that “he did not wish to be believed to be the best but to be it.” The passage continues with the words Glaucon quotes below at 362a–b.
away his reputation, for a reputation for justice would bring him honor and rewards, so that it wouldn’t be clear whether he is just for the sake of justice itself or for the sake of those honors and rewards. We must strip him of everything except justice and make his situation the opposite of an unjust person’s. Though he does no injustice, he must have the greatest reputation for it, so that he can be tested as regards justice unsoftened by his bad reputation and its effects. Let him stay like that unchanged until he dies—just, but all his life believed to be unjust. In this way, both will reach the extremes, the one of justice and the other of injustice, and we’ll be able to judge which of them is happier.

Whew! Glaucon, I said, how vigorously you’ve scoured each of the men for our competition, just as you would a pair of statues for an art competition.

I do the best I can, he replied. Since the two are as I’ve described, in any case, it shouldn’t be difficult to complete the account of the kind of life that awaits each of them, but it must be done. And if what I say sounds crude, Socrates, remember that it isn’t I who speak but those who praise injustice at the expense of justice. They’ll say that a just person in such circumstances will be whipped, stretched on a rack, chained, blinded with fire, and, at the end, when he has suffered every kind of evil, he’ll be impaled, and will realize then that one shouldn’t want to be just but to be believed to be just. Indeed, Aeschylus’ words are far more correctly applied to unjust people than to just ones, for the supporters of injustice will say that a really unjust person, having a way of life based on the truth about things and not living in accordance with opinion, doesn’t want simply to be believed to be unjust but actually to be so—

_Harvesting a deep furrow in his mind,_
_Where wise counsels propagate._

He rules his city because of his reputation for justice; he marries into any family he wishes; he gives his children in marriage to anyone he wishes; he has contracts and partnerships with anyone he wants; and besides benefiting himself in all these ways, he profits because he has no scruples about doing injustice. In any contest, public or private, he’s the winner and outdoes his enemies. And by outdoing them, he becomes wealthy, benefiting his friends and harming his enemies. He makes adequate sacrifices to the gods and sets up magnificent offerings to them. He takes better care of the gods, therefore, (and, indeed, of the human beings he’s fond of) than a just person does. Hence it’s likely that the gods, in turn, will take better care of him than of a just person. That’s what they say, Socrates, that gods and humans provide a better life for unjust people than for just ones.

When Glaucon had said this, I had it in mind to respond, but his brother Adeimantus intervened: You surely don’t think that the position has been adequately stated?
Why not? I said. The most important thing to say hasn’t been said yet.

Well, then, I replied, a man’s brother must stand by him, as the saying goes. If Glaucon has omitted something, you must help him. Yet what he has said is enough to throw me to the canvas and make me unable to come to the aid of justice.

Nonsense, he said. Hear what more I have to say, for we should also fully explore the arguments that are opposed to the ones Glaucon gave, the ones that praise justice and find fault with injustice, so that what I take to be his intention may be clearer.

When fathers speak to their sons, they say that one must be just, as do all the others who have charge of anyone. But they don’t praise justice itself, only the high reputations it leads to and the consequences of being thought to be just, such as the public offices, marriages, and other things Glaucon listed. But they elaborate even further on the consequences of reputation. By bringing in the esteem of the gods, they are able to talk about the abundant good things that they themselves and the noble Hesiod and Homer say that the gods give to the pious, for Hesiod says that the gods make the oak trees

Bear acorns at the top and bees in the middle
And make fleecy sheep heavy laden with wool

for the just, and tells of many other good things akin to these. And Homer is similar:

When a good king, in his piety,
Upholds justice, the black earth bears
Wheat and barley for him, and his trees are heavy with fruit.
His sheep bear lambs unfailingly, and the sea yields up its fish.

Musaeus and his son make the gods give the just more headstrong goods than these. In their stories, they lead the just to Hades, seat them on couches, provide them with a symposium of pious people, crown them with wreaths, and make them spend all their time drinking—as if they thought drunkenness was the finest wage of virtue. Others stretch even further the wages that virtue receives from the gods, for they say that someone who is pious and keeps his promises leaves his children’s children and a whole race behind him. In these and other similar ways, they praise

2. See Odyssey xvi.97–98.
3. The two last quotations are from Works and Days 232 ff. and Odyssey xix.109–13, omitting 110, respectively.
4. Musaeus was a legendary poet closely associated with the mystery religion of Orphism.
justice. They bury the impious and unjust in mud in Hades; force them to carry water in a sieve; bring them into bad repute while they’re still alive, and all those penalties that Glaucon gave to the just person they give to the unjust. But they have nothing else to say. This, then, is the way people praise justice and find fault with injustice.

Besides this, Socrates, consider another form of argument about justice and injustice employed both by private individuals and by poets. All go on repeating with one voice that justice and moderation are fine things, but hard and onerous, while licentiousness and injustice are sweet and easy to acquire and are shameful only in opinion and law. They add that unjust deeds are for the most part more profitable than just ones, and, whether in public or private, they willingly honor vicious people who have wealth and other types of power and declare them to be happy. But they dishonor and disregard the weak and the poor, even though they agree that they are better than the others.

But the most wonderful of all these arguments concerns what they have to say about the gods and virtue. They say that the gods, too, assign misfortune and a bad life to many good people, and the opposite fate to their opposites. Begging priests and prophets frequent the doors of the rich and persuade them that they possess a god-given power founded on sacrifices and incantations. If the rich person or any of his ancestors has committed an injustice, they can fix it with pleasant rituals. Moreover, if he wishes to injure some enemy, then, at little expense, he’ll be able to harm just and unjust alike, for by means of spells and enchantments they can persuade the gods to serve them. And the poets are brought forward as witnesses to all these accounts. Some harp on the ease of vice, as follows:

Vice in abundance is easy to get;
The road is smooth and begins beside you,
But the gods have put sweat between us and virtue,

and a road that is long, rough, and steep. Others quote Homer to bear witness that the gods can be influenced by humans, since he said:

The gods themselves can be swayed by prayer,
And with sacrifices and soothing promises,
Incense and libations, human beings turn them from their purpose
When someone has transgressed and sinned.

And they present a noisy throng of books by Musaeus and Orpheus, offspring as they say of Selene and the Muses, in accordance with which

they perform their rituals. And they persuade not only individuals but whole cities that the unjust deeds of the living or the dead can be absolved or purified through ritual sacrifices and pleasant games. These initiations, as they call them, free people from punishment hereafter, while a terrible fate awaits those who have not performed the rituals.

When all such sayings about the attitudes of gods and humans to virtue and vice are so often repeated, Socrates, what effect do you suppose they have on the souls of young people? I mean those who are clever and are able to flit from one of these sayings to another, so to speak, and gather from them an impression of what sort of person he should be and of how best to travel the road of life. He would surely ask himself Pindar’s question, “Should I by justice or by crooked deceit scale this high wall and live my life guarded and secure?” And he’ll answer: “The various sayings suggest that there is no advantage in my being just if I’m not also thought just, while the troubles and penalties of being just are apparent. But they tell me that an unjust person, who has secured for himself a reputation for justice, lives the life of a god. Since, then, ‘opinion forcibly overcomes truth’ and ‘controls happiness,’ as the wise men say, I must surely turn entirely to it. I should create a façade of illusory virtue around me to deceive those who come near, but keep behind it the greedy and crafty fox of the wise Archilochus.”

“But surely,” someone will object, “it isn’t easy for vice to remain always hidden.” We’ll reply that nothing great is easy. And, in any case, if we’re to be happy, we must follow the path indicated in these accounts. To remain undiscovered we’ll form secret societies and political clubs. And there are teachers of persuasion to make us clever in dealing with assemblies and law courts. Therefore, using persuasion in one place and force in another, we’ll outdo others without paying a penalty.

“What about the gods? Surely, we can’t hide from them or use violent force against them!” Well, if the gods don’t exist or don’t concern themselves with human affairs, why should we worry at all about hiding from them? If they do exist and do concern themselves with us, we’ve learned all we know about them from the laws and the poets who give their genealogies—nowhere else. But these are the very people who tell us that the gods can be persuaded and influenced by sacrifices, gentle prayers, and offerings. Hence, we should believe them on both matters or neither. If we believe them, we should be unjust and offer sacrifices from the fruits of our injustice. If we are just, our only gain is not to be punished by the gods, since we lose the profits of injustice. But if we are unjust, we get the

7. It is not clear whether Orpheus was a real person or a mythical figure. His fame in Greek myth rests on the poems in which the doctrines of the Orphic religion are set forth.
8. The quotation is attributed to Simonides, whom Polemarchus cites in Book I.
9. Archilochus of Paros (c. 756–716 B.C.) was an iambic and elegiac poet who composed a famous fable about the fox and the hedgehog.
profits of our crimes and transgressions and afterwards persuade the gods by prayer and escape without punishment.

“But in Hades won’t we pay the penalty for crimes committed here, either ourselves or our children’s children?” “My friend,” the young man will say as he does his calculation, “mystery rites and the gods of absolution have great power. The greatest cities tell us this, as do those children of the gods who have become poets and prophets.”

Why, then, should we still choose justice over the greatest injustice? Many eminent authorities agree that, if we practice such injustice with a false façade, we’ll do well at the hands of gods and humans, living and dying as we’ve a mind to. So, given all that has been said, Socrates, how is it possible for anyone of any power—whether of mind, wealth, body, or birth—to be willing to honor justice and not laugh aloud when he hears it praised? Indeed, if anyone can show that what we’ve said is false and has adequate knowledge that justice is best, he’ll surely be full not of anger but of forgiveness for the unjust. He knows that, apart from someone of godlike character who is disgusted by injustice or one who has gained knowledge and avoids injustice for that reason, no one is just willingly. Through cowardice or old age or some other weakness, people do indeed object to injustice. But it’s obvious that they do so only because they lack the power to do injustice, for the first of them to acquire it is the first to do as much injustice as he can.

And all of this has no other cause than the one that led Glaucon and me to say to you: “Socrates, of all of you who claim to praise justice, from the original heroes of old whose words survive, to the men of the present day, not one has ever blamed injustice or praised justice except by mentioning the reputations, honors, and rewards that are their consequences. No one has ever adequately described what each itself does of its own power by its presence in the soul of the person who possesses it, even if it remains hidden from gods and humans. No one, whether in poetry or in private conversations, has adequately argued that injustice is the worst thing a soul can have in it and that justice is the greatest good. If you had treated the subject in this way and persuaded us from youth, we wouldn’t now be guarding against one another’s injustices, but each would be his own best guardian, afraid that by doing injustice he’d be living with the worst thing possible.”

Thrasymachus or anyone else might say what we’ve said, Socrates, or maybe even more, in discussing justice and injustice—crudely inverting their powers, in my opinion. And, frankly, it’s because I want to hear the opposite from you that I speak with all the force I can muster. So don’t merely give us a theoretical argument that justice is stronger than injustice, but tell us what each itself does, because of its own powers, to someone who possesses it, that makes justice bad and justice good. Follow Glaucon’s advice, and don’t take reputations into account, for if you don’t deprive justice and injustice of their true reputations and attach false ones to them, we’ll say that you are not praising them but their reputations
and that you’re encouraging us to be unjust in secret. In that case, we’ll say that you agree with Thrasymachus that justice is the good of another, the advantage of the stronger, while injustice is one’s own advantage and profit, though not the advantage of the weaker.

You agree that justice is one of the greatest goods, the ones that are worth getting for the sake of what comes from them, but much more so for their own sake, such as seeing, hearing, knowing, being healthy, and all other goods that are fruitful by their own nature and not simply because of reputation. Therefore, praise justice as a good of that kind, explaining how—because of its very self—it benefits its possessors and how injustice harms them. Leave wages and reputations for others to praise.

Others would satisfy me if they praised justice and blamed injustice in that way, extolling the wages of one and denigrating those of the other. But you, unless you order me to be satisfied, wouldn’t, for you’ve spent your whole life investigating this and nothing else. Don’t, then, give us only a theoretical argument that justice is stronger than injustice, but show what effect each has because of itself on the person who has it—the one for good and the other for bad—whether it remains hidden from gods and human beings or not.

While I’d always admired the natures of Glaucon and Adeimantus, I was especially pleased on this occasion, and I said: You are the sons of a great man, and Glaucon’s lover began his elegy well when he wrote, celebrating your achievements at the battle of Megara,

*Sons of Ariston, godlike offspring of a famous man.*

That’s well said in my opinion, for you must indeed be affected by the divine if you’re not convinced that injustice is better than justice and yet can speak on its behalf as you have done. And I believe that you really are unconvinced by your own words. I infer this from the way you live, for if I had only your words to go on, I wouldn’t trust you. The more I trust you, however, the more I’m at a loss as to what to do. I don’t see how I can be of help. Indeed, I believe I’m incapable of it. And here’s my evidence. I thought what I said to Thrasymachus showed that justice is better than injustice, but you won’t accept it from me. On the other hand, I don’t see how I can refuse my help, for I fear that it may even be impious to have breath in one’s body and the ability to speak and yet to stand idly by and not defend justice when it is being prosecuted. So the best course is to give justice any assistance I can.

Glaucon and the others begged me not to abandon the argument but to help in every way to track down what justice and injustice are and what the truth about their benefits is. So I told them what I had in mind: The investigation we’re undertaking is not an easy one but requires keen eyesight. Therefore, since we aren’t clever people, we should adopt the method of investigation that we’d use if, lacking keen eyesight, we were told to read small letters from a distance and then noticed that the same