And a just person is good?
Indeed.
Then, Polemarchus, it isn’t the function of a just person to harm a friend or anyone else, rather it is the function of his opposite, an unjust person?
In my view that’s completely true, Socrates.
If anyone tells us, then, that it is just to give to each what he’s owed and understands by this that a just man should harm his enemies and benefit his friends, he isn’t wise to say it, since what he says isn’t true, for it has become clear to us that it is never just to harm anyone?
I agree.
You and I shall fight as partners, then, against anyone who tells us that Simonides, Bias, Pittacus, or any of our other wise and blessedly happy men said this.
I, at any rate, am willing to be your partner in the battle.
Do you know to whom I think the saying belongs that it is just to benefit friends and harm enemies?
Who?
I think it belongs to Periander, or Perdiccas, or Xerxes, or Ismenias of Corinth, or some other wealthy man who believed himself to have great power.9 That’s absolutely true.
All right, since it has become apparent that justice and the just aren’t what such people say they are, what else could they be?
While we were speaking, Thrasymachus had tried many times to take over the discussion but was restrained by those sitting near him, who wanted to hear our argument to the end. When we paused after what I’d just said, however, he couldn’t keep quiet any longer. He coiled himself up like a wild beast about to spring, and he hurled himself at us as if to tear us to pieces.
Polemarchus and I were frightened and flustered as he roared into our midst: What nonsense have you two been talking, Socrates? Why do you act like idiots by giving way to one another? If you truly want to know what justice is, don’t just ask questions and then refute the answers simply to satisfy your competitiveness or love of honor. You know very well that it is easier to ask questions than answer them. Give an answer yourself, and tell us what you say the just is. And don’t tell me that it’s the right, the beneficial, the profitable, the gainful, or the advantageous, but tell me clearly and exactly what you mean; for I won’t accept such nonsense from you.
His words startled me, and, looking at him, I was afraid. And I think that if I hadn’t seen him before he stared at me, I’d have been dumbstruck. But as it was, I happened to look at him just as our discussion began to exasperate him, so I was able to answer, and, trembling a little, I said:

9. The first three named are notorious tyrants or kings, the fourth a man famous for his extraordinary wealth.
Don’t be too hard on us, Thrasymachus, for if Polemarchus and I made an error in our investigation, you should know that we did so unwillingly. If we were searching for gold, we’d never willingly give way to each other, if by doing so we’d destroy our chance of finding it. So don’t think that in searching for justice, a thing more valuable than even a large quantity of gold, we’d mindlessly give way to one another or be less than completely serious about finding it. You surely mustn’t think that, but rather—as I do—that we’re incapable of finding it. Hence it’s surely far more appropriate for us to be pitied by you clever people than to be given rough treatment.

When he heard that, he gave a loud, sarcastic laugh. By Heracles, he said, that’s just Socrates’ usual irony. I knew, and I said so to these people earlier, that you’d be unwilling to answer and that, if someone questioned you, you’d be ironical and do anything rather than give an answer.

That’s because you’re a clever fellow, Thrasymachus. You knew very well that if you ask someone how much twelve is, and, as you ask, you warn him by saying “Don’t tell me, man, that twelve is twice six, or three times four, or six times two, or four times three, for I won’t accept such nonsense,” then you’ll see clearly, I think, that no one could answer a question framed like that. And if he said to you: “What are you saying, Thrasymachus, am I not to give any of the answers you mention, not even if twelve happens to be one of those things? I’m amazed. Do you want me to say something other than the truth? Or do you mean something else?” What answer would you give him?

Well, so you think the two cases are alike?

Why shouldn’t they be alike? But even if they aren’t alike, yet seem so to the person you asked, do you think him any less likely to give the answer that seems right to him, whether we forbid him to or not?

Is that what you’re going to do, give one of the forbidden answers?

I wouldn’t be surprised—provided that it’s the one that seems right to me after I’ve investigated the matter.

What if I show you a different answer about justice than all these—and a better one? What would you deserve then?

What else than the appropriate penalty for one who doesn’t know, namely, to learn from the one who does know? Therefore, that’s what I deserve.

You amuse me, but in addition to learning, you must pay a fine.

I will as soon as I have some money.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Of course.

And in each city this element is stronger, namely, the ruler?

Certainly.

And each makes laws to its own advantage. Democracy makes democratic laws, tyranny makes tyrannical laws, and so on with the others. And they declare what they have made—what is to their own advantage—to be just for their subjects, and they punish anyone who goes against this as lawless and unjust. This, then, is what I say justice is, the same in all cities, the advantage of the established rule. Since the established rule is surely stronger, anyone who reasons correctly will conclude that the just is the same everywhere, namely, the advantage of the stronger.

Now I see what you mean. Whether it’s true or not, I’ll try to find out. But you yourself have answered that the just is the advantageous, Thrasymachus, whereas you forbade that answer to me. True, you’ve added “of the stronger” to it.

10. The pancration was a mixture of boxing and wrestling.