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More Information

Book 1[1]

327 I went down to the Piraeus yesterday with Glaucon the son of Ariston, to offer a prayer to the goddess.[2] Also I wanted to watch the festival, to see how they would conduct it, since this was the first time it was being celebrated.[3] The parade of Athenians struck me as excellent, and the show put on by the Thracians was every bit as impressive, I thought. We offered our prayers, watched the festival, and then started off on our journey back
b to town. We were already on our way home when we were spotted by Polemarchus the son of Cephalus. He got his slave to run after us and tell us to wait for him. The slave tugged at my cloak from behind, and said, 'Polemarchus says you are to wait.' I turned round, and asked him where his master was.

'There he is,' he said, 'coming along behind you. Wait for him.'

'We will,' said Glaucon.

c In a few moments Polemarchus reached us, with Glaucon's brother Adeimantus, Niceratus the son of Nicias, and a few others. They had been watching the procession, apparently. And Polemarchus said, 'It looks as if you're all on your way back to the city, Socrates. You're not staying, then?'

[1] It has been traditional since antiquity to divide the *Republic* into ten 'books'. Each book corresponds to a single roll of papyrus, the format in which Plato's writings were archived, distributed, and read in the ancient world. We do not know whether the division into ten books was made by Plato himself or by a later editor. The numbers and letters in the margin follow the pagination of the sixteenth-century edition of Plato by Stephanus. It is the pagination normally used to circumvent differences of format among subsequent editions and translations.

[2] Bendis, as we are eventually told at the end of Book 1 (354a).

[3] We can date this occasion only to a window of time between 431 and 411 BC.

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'That's a pretty good guess,' I replied.

'Do you see how many of us there are?' he asked.

'Yes.'

'Well, then,' he said, 'you must either get the better of all these people, or else stay here.'

'There is another possibility,' I said. 'We might persuade you that you should let us go.'

'And do you really think you could persuade us,' he said, 'if we refused to listen?'

'Of course not,' said Glaucon.

'In that case, make your decision on the assumption that we are *not* going to listen.'

328 'Haven't you heard about the torch race?' Adeimantus added. 'This evening, on horseback, in honour of the goddess?'

'On horseback?' I said. 'That's something new. Do you mean a relay race on horseback, passing torches from one to another?'

'Yes,' said Polemarchus. 'And they're going to have an all-night ceremony as well, which should be worth watching. We can go out and watch
b it after dinner. There'll be lots of young people there. We can spend some time with them, and talk to them. Do stay. Please say "yes."'

'It looks as if we shall have to,' said Glaucon.

'If that's your decision,' I said, 'we shall.'

So we went back to Polemarchus' house, where we found Polemarchus' brothers Lysias and Euthydemus – as well as Thrasymachus of Chalcedon, Charmantides from the deme[4] of Paeania, and Cleitophon the son of Aristonymus. Also there, in the house, was Polemarchus' father
c Cephalus. It was a long time since I had seen him, and I found him much aged. He was wearing a garland, and sitting on a sort of cushioned stool. He had just been conducting a sacrifice in the courtyard.[5] There was a circle of stools round him, so we sat down with him.

As soon as he saw me, Cephalus started to make me welcome. 'You don't often come down to visit us in the Piraeus, Socrates,' he said. 'You should, though. If I were still strong enough to make the journey up to
d town without difficulty, there would be no need for you to come here. We would go to you. But as things are, you should come more often. I can assure you, speaking for myself, that the more the pleasures of the body

[4] The territory of Athens and its surrounding countryside was subdivided into districts called 'demes', each with some degree of self-government.

[5] Cephalus' garland is an item of sacrificial uniform.

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More Information

fade, the greater become one's desire and taste for conversation. So do please spend some time with these young men. Do come here and visit us. Regard us as your friends – as your family, even.'

e 'With pleasure, Cephalus,' I replied. 'I love talking to the very old. It's as if they're a long way ahead of us on a road which we too are probably going to have to travel. I feel we should learn from them what the road is like – whether it's steep and rough going, or gentle and easy. In particular, I'd very much like to hear how it strikes you, now that you've actually reached the time of life which the poets call "old age, the threshold."[6] What is your report on it? Would you call it a difficult time of life?'

329 'I'll tell you exactly how it strikes me, Socrates. There's a group of us who meet fairly often. We're all about the same age, so we're following the words of the old proverb.[7] When we meet, most of them start complaining; they say they miss the things they used to enjoy when they were young, and they recall their sexual exploits, their drinking, their feasting, and everything connected with those pleasures. They get upset, as if they'd suffered some great loss – as if then they had led a wonderful life,

b whereas now they're not alive at all. Some of them also complain about the lack of respect shown by their families towards old age, and under this heading they recite a litany of grievances against old age. I think they're putting the blame in the wrong place, Socrates. If old age were to blame, then not only would I have felt the same way about old age, but so would everyone else who has ever reached this age. And yet I've met several people who are not like this – most notably Sophocles the poet. I was there

c once when someone asked him, "How is your sex life, Sophocles? Are you still capable of making love to a woman?" "Don't talk about it, my good sir," was Sophocles' reply. "It is with the greatest relief that I have escaped it. Like escaping from a fierce and frenzied master." I thought that a good reply at the time, and I still think it a good one now. Old age is altogether a time of great peace and freedom from that sort of thing.

d 'When our appetites fade, and loosen their grip on us, then what happens is exactly what Sophocles was talking about. It is a final release from a bunch of insane masters. Both in this, and in your relations with your family, there is only one thing responsible, and that is not old age, but your character. For those who are civilised and contented, then even

[6] That is, the threshold of death. The phrase is common in Homer and other epic poets.

[7] The proverb runs, literally, 'People of the same age please each other' and has no exact proverbial match in English – but compare 'birds of a feather flock together'.

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More Information

old age is only a slight burden. Otherwise – for those who are not like this – both old age and youth prove hard to cope with.'

I was very impressed by what he said, and I wanted him to go on
e talking. So I prompted him further: 'I suspect most people don't believe you, Cephalus, when you say that. They think it is not your character which makes old age easy for you, but the fact that you have plenty of money. The rich, they say, have many consolations.'

'You're right,' he said. 'They don't believe me. And there's some truth in what they say. But not as much truth as they think. Themistocles'
330 famous saying is very much to the point here. A man from Seriphus started making disparaging remarks about him, and telling him that his fame was due not to his own merits, but to those of his city. Themistocles' reply was that though he himself would never have been famous if he had been born in Seriphus, neither would the other man have been if he had been born in Athens. The same applies to those who are not rich, and who find old age hard to bear. In poverty, even the right temperament will not find old age altogether easy, whereas the wrong temperament, even with the aid of wealth, will never be at peace with itself.'

'Did you inherit most of the money you possess, Cephalus?' I asked. 'Or is most of it money you made yourself, on top of your inheritance?'

b 'Did I add to it, Socrates? When it comes to making money, I'm somewhere between my grandfather and my father. My grandfather – my namesake – inherited about as much wealth as I now possess, and increased it many times. My father Lysanias reduced it to even less than it is now. I shall be happy if I can leave these boys not less, but a little bit more, than I inherited.'

c 'The reason I asked,' I said, 'is that you've never struck me as being particularly fond of money. And that's generally the attitude of those who haven't made it themselves. Compared with most people, self-made men are doubly fond of their money. Those who have made a fortune are devoted to their money in the first place because it is their own creation – just as poets love their poems, or fathers love their children – and in the second place for what they can do with it, just like anyone else. This makes them very poor company, since they can see no value in anything except money.'

'You're right,' he said.

d 'Yes,' I said. 'But I have another question for you. What would you say is the greatest benefit you have derived from your possession of great wealth?'

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Excerpt
More Information

'One which many people might not be inclined to believe, if I told them. But you can take my word for it, Socrates, that when you are confronted by the thought of your own death, you are visited by fear and anxiety about things which never troubled you before. The stories told about what happens in Hades, that anyone who is unjust here will have to
e pay for it there – stories you once laughed at – begin to trouble your mind. You wonder if they may be true. You start seeing that world for yourself, either through the infirmity of old age, or because you are already in some way closer to it. Suddenly you are full of suspicion and fear; you start calculating and considering whether you've done anyone any sort of injustice. And if you find many acts of injustice in your own life, you keep
331 waking in a panic in the middle of the night, the way children do. You live in a state of apprehension. The person with nothing on his conscience, by contrast, has fine and pleasant hopes – a nurse to his old age, as Pindar puts it. He found just the right words for it, Socrates, when he said that anyone who lives his life in righteousness and purity will find that

> Sweet hope, old age's nurse, which chiefly guides
> Men's wayward minds, accompanies his heart
> And so protects him.[8]

He's right – couldn't be more right. And that's why I attach the greatest
b importance to the possession of money. Not for everyone, but for those of good character. If you want to avoid defrauding people, or lying to them, however reluctantly, or going to the world below in a state of terror after failing to pay what you owe – whether sacrifices to a god, or money to a man – then the possession of money contributes in no small measure to this end. Of course it has many other uses as well, but weighing one thing against another I would rate this as one of the most important uses of money, in the eyes of anyone with any sense.'

c 'That's admirably put, Cephalus,' I said. 'But since you've brought up the subject of justice, can we say, quite simply, that it is truthfulness, and returning anything you may have received from anyone else? Or is it sometimes right to behave in these ways, and sometimes wrong? Let me give you an example. Suppose you borrowed some weapons from a friend when he was in his right mind. Suppose he later went mad, and then asked for them back again. Everyone would agree, I imagine, that you shouldn't give them back to him, and that anyone who did give them back

[8] The poem from which this quotation comes has been lost.

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G. R. F. Ferrari, Tom Griffith
Excerpt
More Information

– or who was even prepared to be completely truthful to someone in this condition – would not be doing the right thing.'

d 'Correct,' he said.

'This is not the definition of justice, then – that it is telling the truth, and returning what you have been given.'

'Yes, it is, Socrates,' Polemarchus interrupted. 'At least, it is if we are to believe Simonides.'

'I'd just like to say,' Cephalus put in, 'that this is where I hand the discussion over to you. It's time I was doing something about the sacrifices.'

'Well, am I not Polemarchus, your heir?'

'You certainly are,' he replied with a laugh, and went off to his sacrifices.

e 'Tell me then,' I said, 'you who have inherited the argument, what does Simonides say about justice that you think is correct?'

'That it is just to pay everyone what is owed to him.[9] That's what he says, and I think he's right.'

'Well,' I said, 'Simonides is a wise and inspired man. It is certainly not easy to disagree with him. But what on earth does he mean by this remark? You may well know, Polemarchus. I have no idea. He obviously doesn't mean what we were talking about just now. If one person gives something to another for safe keeping, and then asks for it back when he
332 is not in his right mind, Simonides doesn't mean that the other person should give it to him. And yet I imagine the thing which was given for safe keeping *is* owed to the person who gave it, isn't it?'

'Yes.'

'In that situation – when someone goes out of his mind, and then asks for it back – isn't returning it completely out of the question?'

'Yes, it is.'

'That isn't what Simonides means, apparently, when he says that it is just to pay back what is owed, or due.'

'No, it certainly isn't,' he said. 'What he thinks is due to friends is to do them good, not harm.'

'I understand,' I replied. 'If one person gives back to another money
b which the other has given him for safe keeping, he is not giving what is due if his returning it and the other's receiving it are harmful, and if the two of them are friends. Isn't that what you think Simonides means?'

'Yes, it is.'

[9] Not a sentiment that is found in the little that survives of Simonides' poetry.

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Excerpt
More Information

'What about enemies? Should you give them whatever is in fact due to them?"

'You certainly should,' he said. 'And what is due between enemies is what is appropriate – something harmful.'

'Simonides was speaking as a poet, then, apparently, and disguising his
c definition of justice. What he meant, it seems, was that justice was giving any individual what was appropriate for him, but he called it "what was owed."'

'Yes, that must have been what he meant.'

'Suppose, then, one of us had said to him: "Simonides, take the art or skill which is called medicine. What does it give that is due and appropriate, and to what does it give it?" What do you think his answer would have been?'

'Obviously,' he replied, 'he would have said it gives the body drugs and food and drink.'

'And the art of cookery? What does it give that is due and appropriate, and to what does it give it?'

d 'It gives flavour to cooked food.'

'Very well. Then what about the art or skill which we would call justice? What does it give, and to what does it give it?'

'Well, if we are to follow the previous definitions, Socrates, it gives benefits and injuries to friends and enemies.'

'Does he mean, then, that helping your friends and harming your enemies is justice?'

'I think so.'

'All right. When people are unwell, when it's a question of sickness and health, who is best at helping them if they are friends and harming them if they are enemies?'

'A doctor.'

e 'And when they're at sea? Who can best help or harm them amid the dangers of a sea voyage?'

'A ship's captain.'

'What about the just man? In what activity, and for what purpose, is he the one best able to treat his friends well and his enemies badly?'

'In war and alliances, I think.'

'Very well. Now, when people aren't ill, my dear Polemarchus, a doctor is no use to them.'

'True.'

'And when they're not at sea, a ship's captain is no use to them.'

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Excerpt
More Information

'No.'

'Does that mean the just man is no use to them when they're not at war?'

'No, I'm sure it doesn't.'

'Justice is something useful even in peacetime, then?'

333 'Yes, it is.'

'But then so is agriculture, isn't it?'

'Yes.'

'For producing crops.'

'Yes.'

'And shoemaking?'

'Yes, that's useful.'

'For producing shoes, you would say, presumably.'

'Of course.'

'What about justice, then? When you say it's useful in peacetime, what is it useful *for*? What does it produce?'

'Contracts, Socrates.'

'And by contracts do you mean partnerships, or something else?'

'I mean partnerships.'

b 'All right. Is the just man a good and useful partner when it comes to making moves in draughts?[10] Or would someone who plays draughts be more use?'

'Someone who plays draughts would be more use.'

'And when it comes to bricklaying, or building in stone, is the just man a more useful and better partner than a builder?'

'Of course not.'

'Well, in what kind of partnership is the just man a better partner than a lyre player, in the way a lyre player is better at playing the notes?'

'In partnerships involving money, I think.'

'Unless by any chance, Polemarchus, it's a question of putting the

c money to some use – if you have to buy or sell a horse jointly, for a sum of money. In that case, I imagine, someone who knows about horses is more use, isn't he?'

'Apparently.'

'And for buying or selling a ship, you'd want a shipbuilder or ship's captain.'

[10] 'Draughts' (American 'checkers') is a translation of convenience. The Greek word *petteia* seems to have applied to several board-games. The group includes but is not limited to strategic games of battle and capture.

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Excerpt
More Information

'So it seems.'

'In what situation, then, requiring the joint use of silver or gold, is the just man more useful than anyone else?'

'When there's a need to deposit money, and have it kept safe.'

'You mean when there's no need to put it to any use. You just want it to stay where it is?'

'That's right.'

'So it's when money is useless that justice is useful for dealing with
d it?'[11]

'It looks like it.'

'And a pruning-knife? When you want to keep it safe, then justice is useful, both in public life and in private life. But when you want to use it, then the art of viticulture is what you want?'

'Apparently.'

'And are you going to say the same about a shield or a lyre? That justice is useful when you need to keep them safe and not use them? But that when you do need to use them, then you want the soldier's art and the art of music?'

'I shall have to say that.'

'And in all other examples, justice is useless when it comes to using any of them, and useful only when they are useless?'

'I suppose so.'

e 'In that case, my friend, justice might not seem to be of any great importance, if its only use is when things are useless. But let's look at a different question. In a fight – a boxing match, possibly, or a fight of some other sort – isn't the person who is cleverest at delivering a blow also the cleverest at guarding against one?'

'He certainly is.'

'And with disease? Is the person who is clever at guarding against it also the cleverest at implanting it secretly?'

'Yes, I think so.'

334 'And in warfare, the man who is good at guarding a military camp is also good at deception. He can steal the enemies' plans, or defeat their undertakings by stealth.'

'Certainly.'

'So whenever someone is clever at guarding something, he will also be clever at stealing it.'

[11] Money deposited with bankers or in temple treasuries did not gain interest.

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Excerpt
More Information

'It looks like it.'

'So if the just man is clever at looking after money, he is also clever at stealing it.'

'Well, that's what the argument suggests,' he said.

'Then the just man, it seems, has turned out to be a kind of thief. You're
b probably thinking of Homer. He praises Autolycus, Odysseus' grandfather on his mother's side, and says that

> In swearing oaths and thieving he surpassed
> All men.[12]

Justice, according to you and Homer and Simonides, is apparently a kind of art of stealing – but with a view to helping one's friends and harming one's enemies. Wasn't that what you said?'

'No, I certainly didn't,' he said. 'Though personally, I don't any longer know what I was saying. But one thing I do think still, and that is that justice is treating your friends well and your enemies badly.'

c 'By friends do you mean the people each individual believes to be good, or those who really are good, even if he doesn't realise it? And the same with enemies?'

'In all probability,' he replied, 'people will like those they think are good, and dislike those they think are no good.'

'And do people ever make mistakes in this? Do they often think people are good when they are not, and vice versa?'

'Yes, they do make mistakes.'

'So for these people, are the good their enemies, and the bad their friends?'

'They certainly are.'

d 'Is it nevertheless just for these people, when this happens, to treat well those who are no good, and to treat the good badly?'

'It looks like it.'

'And the good are just. They're not the kind of people who do wrong.'

'True.'

'So according to your argument it is just to harm those who do no wrong.'

'Impossible, Socrates. It looks as if the argument is no good.'

'Then it must be right,' I said, 'to treat the unjust badly, and the just well.'

[12] *Odyssey* 19.395–396. Autolycus was a notorious trickster; his name includes the word for 'wolf'. The reference in 'swearing oaths' is to perjury for profit.

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