“I (Socrates) believe that Periander or Perdiccas or Xerxes or Ismenias the Theban, or some other rich and mighty man, who had a great opinion of his own power, was the first to say that justice is 'doing good to your friends and harm to your enemies.'”

Polemarchus: Most true.

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

Several times in the course of the discussion Thrasyymachus had made an attempt to get the argument into his own hands, and had been put off by the rest of those present, who wanted to hear the end. But when Polemarchus and I had done speaking and there was a pause, he could no longer hold his peace; and, gathering himself up, he came at us like a wild beast, seeking to devour us. We were quite panic-stricken at the sight of him.

He roared out to the whole company: “What folly, Socrates, has taken possession of you all? And why, you fools, do you keep deferring to one another? I say that if you want really to know what justice is, you should not only ask but answer, and you should not seek to honor yourself from the refutation of an opponent, but have your own answer; for many people can ask and cannot answer. And now I will not have you say that justice is duty or advantage or profit or gain or interest, for this sort of nonsense will not do for me; I must have clearness and accuracy.”

I was panic-stricken at his words, and could not look at him without trembling. Indeed I believe that if I had not fixed my eye upon him, I should have been struck dumb: but when I saw his fury rising, I looked at him first, and was therefore able to reply to him.

“Thrasymachus,” I said, with a quiver, “Don't be hard on us. Polemarchus and I may have been guilty of a little mistake in the argument, but I can assure you that the error was not intentional. If we were seeking for a dropped coin, you would not imagine that we were 'deferring to one another,' and so losing our chance of finding it. And why, when we are seeking for justice, a thing more precious than many pieces of gold, do you say that we are weakly yielding to one another and not doing our utmost to get at the truth? No, my good friend, we are most willing and anxious to do so, but the fact is that we cannot. And if so, you who know all things should pity us and not be angry with us.”

“How characteristic of Socrates!” he replied, with a bitter laugh; “that's your ironical style! Did I not foresee—have I not already told you--that whatever you were asked you would refuse to answer, and try irony or any other shuffle, in order that you might avoid answering?”
“You are a philosopher, Thrasymachus,” I replied, “and know full well that if you ask a person what numbers multiply to twelve, taking care to prohibit him whom you ask from answering twice six, or three times four, or six times two, or four times three, 'for this sort of nonsense will not do for me,'—then obviously, if that is your way of putting the question, no one can answer you. But suppose that he were to retort, 'Thrasymachus, what do you mean? If one of these numbers which you forbid is the true answer to the question, am I to say falsely that some other number is the right one?—is that your meaning?'—How would you answer him?"

“As if the two cases were at all alike!” he said.

“Why should they not be?” I replied, “and even if they are not, but only appear to be so to the person who is asked, ought he not to say what he thinks, whether you or I forbid him or not?”

Thrasymachus: I presume then that you are going to make one of the answers that I said before that I would not accept?

Socrates: I dare say that I may, despite the danger, if upon reflection I approve of any of them.

T: But what if I give you an answer about justice that is other and better than any of these? What do you deserve to have done to you?

S: Done to me!—as becomes the ignorant, I must learn from the wise—that is what I deserve to have done to me.

T: What, and no payment! a pleasant notion!

S: I will pay when I have the money, I replied.

“But you have the money, Socrates,” said Glaucon: “and you, Thrasymachus, need be under no anxiety about money, for we will all make a contribution for Socrates.”

“Yes,” he replied, “and then Socrates will do as he always does—refuse to answer himself, but take and pull to pieces the answer of someone else.”

“Why, my good friend,” I said, “how can anyone who knows nothing answer, and say that he knows nothing; and who, even if he has some faint notions of his own, is told by a man of authority not to utter them? The natural thing is that the speaker should be someone like yourself who professes to know and can tell what he knows. Will you then kindly answer, for the edification of the company and of myself? What is justice?”

Glaucon and the rest of the company joined in my request, and Thrasymachus, as any one might see, was in reality eager to speak; for he thought that he had an excellent answer, and would distinguish himself. But at first he affected to insist on my answering; at length he consented to begin. “Behold,” he said, “the wisdom of Socrates; he refuses to teach himself, and goes about learning of others, to whom he never even says Thank you.”
“That I learn of others,” I replied, “is quite true; but that I am ungrateful I wholly deny. I have no money, and therefore I pay in praise, which is all I have; and you will very soon find out how ready I am to praise anyone who appears to me to speak well when you answer; for I expect that you will answer well.”

“Listen, then,” he said; “I proclaim that justice is nothing else than the interest of the stronger. And now why do you not praise me? But of course you won’t.”

“Let me first understand you,” I replied. “Justice, as you say, is the interest of the stronger. What, Thrasymachus, do you mean by that? You cannot mean to say that because Mike Tyson, the boxer, is stronger than we are, and finds the eating of beef conducive to his bodily strength, that to eat beef is therefore equally for our good who are weaker than he is, and right and just for us?”

“That's abominable of you, Socrates; you take the words in the sense which is most damaging to the argument.”

“Not at all, my good sir,” I said; “I am trying to understand them; and I wish that you would be a little clearer.”

“Well,” he said, “have you never heard that forms of government differ; there are tyrannies, and there are democracies, and there are aristocracies?”

S: Yes, I know.

T: And the government is the ruling power in each state?

S: Certainly.

T: And the different forms of government make laws democratical, aristocratical, tyrannical, with a view to their own interests; and these laws, which are made by them for their own interests, are the justice which they deliver to their subjects, and they punish anyone who transgresses them as a breaker of the law, and an unjust person. And that is what I mean when I say that in all states there is the same principle of justice, which is the interest of the government; and as the government must be supposed to have power, the only reasonable conclusion is, that there is one principle of justice everywhere, which is that justice is whatever in in the interest of the stronger.

S: Now I understand you, and whether you are right or not I will try to discover. But let me remark, that in defining justice you have yourself used the word 'interest' which you forbade me to use. It is true, however, that in your definition the words 'of the stronger' are added.

T: A small addition, you must allow.

S: Great or small, never mind about that: we must first ask whether what you are saying is the truth. Now we are both agreed that justice is interest of some sort, but you go on to say 'of the stronger'; I am not so sure about this addition, and must therefore consider further.
T: Proceed.

S: I will; and first tell me, do you admit that it is just for subjects to obey their rulers?

T: I do.

S: But are the rulers of states absolutely infallible, or are they sometimes liable to make mistakes?

T: To be sure, he replied, they are liable to make mistakes.

S: Then in making their laws they may sometimes make them rightly, and sometimes not?

T: True.

S: When they make them rightly, they make laws according to their interest; when they are mistaken, they make laws contrary to their interest; you admit that?

T: Yes.

S: And the laws which they make must be obeyed by their subjects,—and that is what you call justice?

T: Doubtless.

S: Then justice, according to your argument, is not only obedience to the interests of the stronger but the reverse?

T: What is that you are saying?

S: I believe I am only repeating what you are saying, but let us consider: Haven’t we admitted that the rulers may be mistaken about their own interest in what they command, and also that justice is to obey the rulers? Hasn’t that been admitted?

T: Yes.

S: Then you must also have acknowledged justice not to be for the interest of the stronger, when the rulers unintentionally command things to be done which are to their own injury. For if, as you say, justice is also the obedience which the subject renders to their commands, in that case, O wisest of men, is there any escape from the conclusion that the weaker are commanded to do, not what is for the interest, but what is for the injury of the stronger?

“Nothing can be clearer, Socrates,” said Polemarchus. “for Thrasymachus himself acknowledges that rulers may sometimes command what is not for their own interest, and that for subjects to obey them is justice.”
S: Yes, Polemarchus,—Thrasymachus said that for subjects to do what was commanded by their rulers is just. But he also said that justice is the interest of the stronger, and, while admitting both these propositions, he further acknowledged that the stronger may command the weaker who are his subjects to do what is not for his own interest; whence follows that justice is the injury quite as much as the interest of the stronger.

“But,” said Cleitophon, “he meant by ‘the interest of the stronger’ what the stronger thought to be his interest,—this was what the weaker had to do; and this was affirmed by him to be justice.”

“There were not his words,” rejoined Polemarchus.

“Never mind,” I replied, “if he now says that they are, let us accept his statement.”

S: Tell me, Thrasymachus, did you mean by justice what the stronger thought to be his interest, whether really so or not?

T: Certainly not. Do you suppose that I call him who is mistaken the stronger at the time when he is mistaken?

S: Yes, my impression was that you did say so, when you admitted that the ruler was not infallible but might be sometimes mistaken.

T: You are using verbal trickery on me, Socrates. Do you mean, for example, that he who is mistaken about the sick is a physician in that he is mistaken? or that he who makes a mistake in arithmetic or grammar is an arithmetician or grammarian at the time when he is making the mistake, in respect of the mistake? True, we say that the physician or arithmetician or grammarian has made a mistake, but this is only a figure of speech; for the fact is that neither the grammarian nor any other person of skill ever makes a mistake in so far as he is what his title implies; none of them makes a mistake unless their skills fail them, and then they cease to be skilled artists. No artist or sage or ruler makes mistakes at the time when he is what his name implies; though he is commonly said to make mistakes, and I adopted the common mode of speaking. But to be perfectly accurate, since you are such a lover of accuracy, we should say that the ruler, in so far as he is a ruler, is infallible, and, being infallible, always commands that which is for his own interest; and the subject is required to execute his commands; and therefore, as I said at first and now repeat, justice is the interest of the stronger.

S: Indeed, Thrasymachus, and do I really appear to you to be using only verbal trickery?

T: Certainly.

S: And do you suppose that I ask these questions with the intent of disputing your argument?

T: No. 'Suppose' is not the word—I know that you intend to dispute my argument; but you will be found out, and by the sheer force of my argument you will never prevail.
S: I shall not make the attempt, my dear man; but to avoid any misunderstanding occurring between us in future, let me ask, in what sense do you speak of a ruler—is he a ruler in the common mode of speaking or in the strict sense of the term?

T: In the strictest of all senses. And now use your verbal trickery if you can; Don’t hold anything back. But you never will be able to, never.

S: And do you imagine that I am such a madman as to try and trick you, Thrasymachus? I might as well shave a lion.

T: Why, you made the attempt a minute ago, and you failed.

S: Enough of these civilities. It will be better that I should ask you a question: Is the physician, taken in that strict sense of which you are speaking, a healer of the sick or a maker of money? And remember that I am now speaking of the true physician.

T: A healer of the sick.

S: And a ship’s captain—that is to say, the true ship’s captain—is he a captain of sailors or a mere sailor?

T: A captain of sailors.

S: The circumstance that he sails in the ship is not to be taken into account; neither is he to be called a sailor; the name ‘ship’s captain’ by which he is distinguished has nothing to do with sailing, but is significant of his skill and of his authority over the sailors?

T: Very true.

S: Now, does every skilled profession have an interest?

T: Certainly.

S: For which the skilled professional has to consider and provide?

T: Yes, that is the aim of skilled professions.

S: And the interest of any skill is the perfection of the skill—this and nothing else?

T: What do you mean?

S: I will describe what I mean by using the body as an example. Suppose you were to ask me whether the body is entirely self-sufficient or whether it has other needs, I should reply: Certainly the body has other needs; for the body may be ill and need to be cured, and therefore has interests to which the art of medicine ministers; and this is the origin and intention of medicine, as you will acknowledge. Am I not right?
T: Quite right, he replied.

S: But is the art of medicine (or any other art) faulty or deficient in the same way that the eye may be deficient in sight or the ear may fail of hearing, and therefore requires another art to provide for its interests? Has an art in itself, any similar liability to faults or defects? Does every art require another supplementary art to provide for its interests, and that another and another without end? Or else do the arts have to look only after their own interests? Or have they no need either of themselves or of another?—having no faults or defects, they have no need to correct them, either by the exercise of their own art or of any other; they have only to consider the interest of their subject-matter. For every art remains pure and faultless while remaining true—that is to say, while perfect and unimpaired. Take the words in your precise sense, and tell me whether I am not right.

T: Yes, clearly.

S: Then medicine does not consider the interest of medicine, but the interest of the body?

T: True.

S: Nor does the art of horsemanship consider the interests of the art of horsemanship, but the interests of the horse?

T: True.

S: So none of the other arts or skilled professions care for themselves, for they have no needs; they care only for that which is the subject of their art or skill?

T: True.

S: But surely, Thrasymachus, the arts are the superiors and rulers of their own subjects?

To this he assented with a good deal of reluctance.

“Then,” I said, “no science or art considers the interest of the stronger or superior, but only the interest of the subject and weaker?”

He made an attempt to contest this proposition also, but finally acquiesced.

“Then,” I continued, “no doctor, in so far as he is a doctor, considers his own good in what he prescribes, but only the good of his patient; for the true doctor is also a ruler having the human body as a subject, and is not a mere money-maker; do you agree?”

T: Yes.

S: And the ship’s captain, likewise, in the strict sense of the term, is a ruler of sailors and not a mere sailor?
T: That has been admitted.

S: And such a ship’s captain will provide and prescribe for the interest of the sailor who is under him, and not for his own interest?

He gave a reluctant 'Yes.'

“Then,” I said, “Thrasymachus, there is no one who, in so far as he is truly a ruler, considers only what is for his own interest, but always what is for the interest of his subjects. He looks to that and that alone in everything which he says and does.”

When we had got to this point in the argument, and every one saw that the definition of justice had been completely upset, Thrasymachus, instead of replying to me, said: “Tell me, Socrates, have you got a nurse?”

“Why do you ask such a question,” I said, “when you ought rather to be answering?”

T: Because she leaves you to snivel, and never wipes your nose: she has not even taught you to know the shepherd from the sheep.

S: What makes you say that?

T: Because you imagine that the shepherd fattens or tends the sheep for their own good and not for the good of himself; and you further imagine that the rulers of states, if they are true rulers, never think of their subjects as sheep, and that they are not studying their own advantage day and night. Oh, no; and you are so entirely astray in your ideas about the just and unjust as not even to know that justice is in reality the interest of the ruler and stronger. You think that the loss of the subject and servant is injustice. In reality, the ruler is the stronger, and his subjects do what is for his interest, and minister to his happiness, which is very far from being their own. Consider further, most foolish Socrates, that the just person is always a loser in comparison with the unjust person. First of all, in private contracts: wherever the unjust is the partner of the just you will find that, when the partnership is dissolved, the unjust man has always ends up with more and the just ends up with less. Secondly, in their dealings with the government: when there is an income-tax, the just man will pay more and the unjust less on the same amount of income; and when there is anything to be received the just one gains nothing and the unjust gains much. Also observe what happens when they take an office. There is the just man neglecting his affairs and perhaps suffering other losses, and getting nothing out of the public, because he is just; moreover he is hated by his friends and acquaintances for refusing to serve them in unlawful ways. But all this is reversed in the case of the unjust man. I am speaking, as before, of injustice on a large scale in which the advantage of the unjust is most apparent; and my meaning will be most clearly seen if we turn to that highest form of injustice in which the criminal is the happiest of men, and those who refuse to do injustice are the most miserable—that is to say tyranny, which by fraud and force takes away the property of others, not little by little but wholesale; comprehending in one, things sacred as well as profane, private and public; for which acts of wrong, if he were detected perpetrating any one of them singly, he would be punished and incur great disgrace—they who do such wrong in particular cases are called robbers of temples, and kidnappers and
burglars and swindlers and thieves. But when a man besides taking away the money of the citizens has made slaves of them, then, instead of these ugly names, he is called happy and blessed, not only by the citizens but by all who hear of his having achieved the consummation of injustice. For people say they dislike injustice because they fear that they may be the victims of it and not because they shrink from committing it. And thus, as I have shown, Socrates, injustice, when on a sufficient scale, has more strength and freedom and mastery than justice; and, as I said at first, justice is the interest of the stronger, whereas injustice is a man's own profit and interest.

Thrasymachus, after he said this, had a mind to go away. But the company would not let him; they insisted that he should remain and defend his position; and I myself added my own humble request that he would not leave us.

“Thrasymachus,” I said to him, “excellent man, how suggestive are your remarks! And are you going to run away before you have fairly taught or learned whether they are true or not? Is the attempt to determine the way of man’s life so small a matter in your eyes—to determine how life may be passed by each one of us to the greatest advantage?”

“And do I differ from you,” he said, “as to the importance of the enquiry?”

“You appear rather,” I replied, “to have no care or thought about us, Thrasymachus—it is to you a matter of indifference whether we live better or worse from not knowing what you say you know. Please, friend, do not keep your knowledge to yourself; we are a large party; and any benefit which you confer upon us will be amply rewarded. For my own part I openly declare that I am not convinced, and that I do not believe injustice to be more gainful than justice, even if uncontrolled and allowed to have free play. For, granting that there may be an unjust man who is able to commit injustice either by fraud or force, still this does not convince me of the superior advantage of injustice, and there may be others who are in the same predicament with myself. Perhaps we may be wrong; if so, you in your wisdom should convince us that we are mistaken in preferring justice to injustice.”

“And how am I to convince you,” he said, “if you are not already convinced by what I have just said; what more can I do for you? Would you have me beat the proof into you?”

“Heaven forbid!” I said; “I would only ask you to be consistent; or, if you change, change openly and let there be no deception. For I must remark, Thrasymachus, if you will recall what was previously said, that although you began by defining the true physician in an exact sense, you did not observe a like exactness when speaking of the shepherd; you thought that the shepherd as a shepherd tends the sheep not with a view to their own good, but like a mere diner or banqueter with a view to the pleasures of the table; or, again, as a trader for sale in the market, and not as a shepherd. Yet surely the art of the shepherd is concerned only with the good of his subjects; he has only to provide the best for them, since the perfection of the art is already ensured whenever all the requirements of it are satisfied. And that was what I was saying just now about the ruler. I conceived that the art of the ruler, considered as ruler, whether in a government or in private life, could only regard the good of his flock or subjects; whereas you seem to think that the rulers in government, that is to say, the true rulers, enjoy being in authority.
T: Think? No, I am sure of it.

S: Then why do men never take lesser offices willingly without payment, unless under the idea that they govern not for the advantage of themselves but for the advantage of others? Let me ask you a question: Are not the several arts different, by reason of their each having a separate function? And, my dear illustrious friend, do say what you think, that we may make a little progress.

T: Yes, that is the difference.

S: And each art gives us a particular good and not merely a general one—medicine, for example, gives us health; navigation, safety at sea, and so on?

T: Yes.

S: And the art of payment has the special function of giving pay: but we do not confuse this with other arts, any more than the art of the ship’s captain is to be confused with the art of medicine, because the health of the captain may be improved by a sea voyage. You would not be inclined to say, would you, that navigation is the art of medicine, at least if we are to adopt your exact use of language?

T: Certainly not.

S: Or because a man is in good health when he receives pay you would not say that the art of payment is medicine?

T: I should not.

S: Nor would you say that medicine is the art of receiving pay because a doctor takes fees when he is engaged in healing?

T: Certainly not.

S: Then the pay is not derived by the several artists from their respective arts. But the truth is, that while the art of medicine gives health, and the art of the builder builds a house, another art attends them which is the art of pay. The various arts may be doing their own business and benefiting that over which they preside, but would the artist receive any benefit from his art unless he were paid as well?

T: I suppose not.

S: But does he therefore confer no benefit if he works for free?

T: Certainly, he confers a benefit.
S: Then now, Thrasymachus, there is no longer any doubt that neither arts nor governments provide for their own interests; but, as we were before saying, they rule and provide for the interests of their subjects who are the weaker and not the stronger—to their good they attend and not to their own good even though they are stronger. And this is the reason, my dear Thrasymachus, why, as I was just now saying, no one is willing to govern; because no one likes to take on other peoples’ problems without being paid to do so. For, in the execution of his work, and in giving his orders to another, the true ruler does not regard his own interest, but always that of his subjects; and therefore in order that rulers may be willing to rule, they must be paid in one of three modes of payment: money, or honor, or a penalty for refusing.

“What do you mean, Socrates?” said Glaucon, “The first two modes of payment are intelligible enough, but what the penalty is I do not understand, or how a penalty can be a payment.”

S: You mean that you do not understand the nature of this payment which to the best men is the great inducement to rule? Of course you know that it is disgraceful to be power-hungry or greedy?

Glaucon: Very true.

S: And for this reason money and honor have no attraction for them; good men do not wish to be openly demanding payment for governing and so to be called money-grubbers, nor by secretly helping themselves to the public tax money to be called thieves. And not being ambitious they do not care about honor. In this way they must be induced to serve from the fear of punishment. And this, as I imagine, is the reason why eagerness to take office, instead of waiting to be compelled, has been deemed dishonorable. Now the worst part of the punishment is that he who refuses to rule is liable to be ruled by one who is worse than himself. And the fear of this, as I imagine, induces the good people to take office, not because they really want to, but because it is a punishment to be governed by those who are not as good. For there is reason to think that if a city were composed entirely of good men, then to avoid office would be as much an object of contention as to obtain office is at present; then we should have plain proof that the true ruler is not meant by nature to regard his own interest, but that of his subjects. Everyone who knew this would choose rather to receive a benefit from another than to have the trouble of conferring one. So far am I from agreeing with Thrasymachus that justice is the interest of the stronger.