

'Well then, Epaminondas: if one of two friends is under an obligation to give, the other is under an obligation to accept. In a battle, one has to avoid an enemy whose aim is good; but in doing good turns it is wrong to avoid or repulse a friend whose giving is well-directed. If poverty is no hardship, neither is wealth so deserving of dishonour and rejection.'

'No,' said Epaminondas, 'but there are people for whom a gift well offered brings more prestige and honour if they do not accept it. Look at it this way. Desires are many and have many objects. Some are, as they say, "innate", and develop in the body with reference to necessary pleasures. Others are adventitious, stimulated by unsubstantiated fancies. If these latter acquire force and strength as a result of long habit under bad education, they frequently prove a more powerful depressive influence on the soul than do the necessary desires. Now habit and exercise often enable reason to draw off some of the strength of the innate passions; but it is on the intruders, the unnecessary desires, that the main force of exercise must be deployed, to cut them down by restraints and inhibitions and let reason chastise them. If rational resistance to food and drink can even force out hunger and thirst, it is obviously far easier to curtail, and indeed ultimately to eliminate, greed and ambition, by denial and restraint. Would you not agree?'

The stranger agreed.

'Then do you acknowledge a difference between exercise and the activity to which exercise is devoted? In athletics, the activity is the competition with the rival for the crown, while the exercise is the physical preparation in the gymnasium. Would you agree that, in the case of virtue too, there is a distinction between the activity and the exercise?'

He agreed.

'Then tell me first: is it an exercise of self-control, or an activity and demonstration of it, if one refrains from base and unlawful pleasures?'

585 'An activity and demonstration.'

'And what about the practice and exercise of self-control? Is it not this by which you Pythagoreans have always been attracted, when you excite your appetite as an exercise, as though it were some sort of animal, and sit down and wait at a splendid

table laden with every kind of food, only to hand it all over to your servants for a feast while you yourselves offer your now chastened appetite a simple meal? The denial of available pleasure, I take it, arms the soul against the forbidden.'

'Yes,' he said.

'Then, my friend, justice also has a way of taking exercise to prevent greed and avarice, not by simply refraining from burgling ones' neighbour's house or mugging and robbing people, nor by refusing to betray friends or country for money. That isn't exercise against avarice, and in these respects fear of the law itself may very well prevent the greedy from doing wrong. No; the man who voluntarily and repeatedly distances himself from perfectly just and permissible sources of profit is also the man who is really exercising and habituating himself to keep away from unjust or unlawful gain. When one is tempted by intense pleasures that are unnatural or damaging, one cannot keep one's thoughts quiet unless one has frequently spurned permitted enjoyments. Likewise, it is not easy to rise above dishonest gain or great material advantage if this comes within reach, unless one has long since chained up one's love of gain and put it under strict guard. If it has been educated to take profit without restraint where it is legitimate to do so, it will wax big at the prospect of crime, and can scarcely be restrained from taking its chance of gain. But when a man has never surrendered to the favours of friends or the gifts of kings, but always rejected every lucky chance and reined in his covetousness wherever it rears up at the prospect of treasure, then his love of gain will not rise in revolt or throw his thoughts into confusion; proud of himself and clear in conscience, such a man will pursue the right without effort. Caphisias and I love these battles, Simmias; and we beg our guest to let us train ourselves on poverty to attain this virtue.'