

# Glaucon's Challenge:

Human Nature, Society, & Morality

# Glaucon on the Origin and Nature of Justice

They [that is, most people] say that to do wrong is naturally good, to be wronged is bad, but the suffering of injury so far exceeds in badness the good of inflicting it that when men have done wrong to each other and suffered it, and have had a taste of both, those who are unable to avoid the latter and practice the former decide that it is profitable to come to an agreement with each other neither to inflict injury nor to suffer it. As a result they begin to make laws and covenants, and the law's command they call lawful and just. This, they say, is the origin and essence of justice; it stands between the best and the worst, the best being to do wrong without paying the penalty and the worst to be wronged without the power of revenge. The just then is a mean between two extremes; it is welcomed and honored because of men's lack of the power to do wrong. The man who has that power, the real man, would not make a compact with anyone not to inflict injury or suffer it. For him that would be madness. This then, Socrates, is, according to their argument, the nature and origin of justice. (Plato, 62)

# What is Glaucon saying about human nature?

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# Glaucon's 4 claims about human nature:

- A. **We like BEST:** doing wrong without paying a penalty.
- B. **We hate WORST:** being wronged without getting revenge.
- C. We hate being wronged **MORE** than we enjoy wronging others.
- D. Most of us aren't able to do injustice without getting hurt by others.

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**Suppose these are true.**

***What happens if we all do as we please?***

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**What happens if we all do as we please?**

**What *should* we do?**



# Glaucon's account of justice:

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Glaucon: When we “have done wrong to each other and suffered it, and have had a taste of both, those who are unable to avoid the latter and practice the former **decide that it is profitable to come to an agreement with each other neither to inflict injury nor to suffer it. As a result [we] begin to make laws and covenants, and the law's command they call lawful and just**” (62).

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**We would be better off if we agreed to:**

1. Give up on hurting others.
2. Don't tolerate those who hurt us: punish them.
3. Make laws forbidding hurting others, and say that obeying the law is just, disobeying is unjust.

So: we don't do what we like best, but we avoid what we hate most.

# What, then, is Glaucon saying about us & society?

- **We're naturally bad:** we like hurting others.
- **We're naturally weak:** we can't get away with doing what we'd like to do.
- **Justice is a compromise** among people who are too weak to do what they really want.
- **So rules, enforced by government, are good for us** insofar as they keep us from getting hurt by others, thereby serving our interests.

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## Is Glaucon right?

# Glaucon's 4 claims: **which is most controversial?**

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**The ring would make you a “real man”: able to do what you like without others catching you.**

**What would you do with it?**

If Glaucon is right, you'd do **bad things**.

Let's see...

If I had the ring, I'd try to become a global spy and attempt to end terrorism perpetuated by extremist organizations around the world.



If I had a ring that would make me invisible, I would sneak onto planes and travel the world.

Unspeakable things

**The ring would make you a “real man”: able to do what you like without others catching you.**

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**What do our data show?**