THE REPUBLIC
Plato

translated by Tom Griffith

Book 2

357 With these words I thought I had finished what I had to say. But I was wrong. Apparently it was only an introduction. Glaucon is an extremely determined character in everything he does, and on this occasion he
b refused to accept Thrasymachus' surrender. 'Socrates,' he said, 'do you really want to convince us that it is in every way better to be just than unjust, or is it enough merely to seem to have convinced us?'

'I would prefer,' I said, 'really to convince you, if I had a choice.'

'In that case,' he said, 'you are not achieving your aim. Tell me this. Do you think there is a good of the kind we would choose to have because we value it for its own sake, and not from any desire for its results? Enjoyment, for example, and pleasures which are harmless and produce no consequences for the future beyond enjoyment for the person who possesses them.'

c 'Yes,' I said, 'I do think there is a good of this kind.'

'What about the sort we value both for itself and for its consequences? Things like thinking, seeing, being healthy. We value goods of this sort, I imagine, for both reasons.'

'Yes,' I said.

'And can you distinguish a third class or category of good,' he asked, 'a class which contains physical exercise, undergoing medical treatment when we are ill, practising medicine, and earning a living in general?
d These we would describe as unpleasant but beneficial. We would not choose to have them for their own sakes, but only for the payment or other benefits which result from them.'

'Yes,' I said, 'there is this third class as well. What of it?'

'In which of these classes,' he asked, 'do you put justice?'

358 'In my opinion,' I replied, 'it is in the finest class, which is to be valued by anyone who wants to be happy, both for itself and for its consequences.'

'That's not what most people think,' he said. 'Most people would put it in the unpleasant class, which we should cultivate in return for payment and reputation, on account of public opinion, but which purely for itself is to be avoided like the plague.'

'I know that's what they think,' I said. 'Thrasymachus criticised it – and praised injustice – on those grounds some while back. But I'm a slow learner, apparently.'

b 'Well,' he said, 'listen to me as well, and see if you agree with what I suggest. I think Thrasymachus too readily allowed himself to be bewitched by you, like a snake being charmed by a snake-charmer. As far as I'm concerned, the proof is not yet convincing, either for justice or injustice. I want to be told what each of them is, and what effect it has, just by itself, when it is present in the soul. I want to forget about the rewards and results it brings. So here's what I am going to do, if you have
c no objection. I'm going to revive Thrasymachus' argument. First I shall say what kind of thing people reckon justice is, and how they think it arises. Secondly I shall claim that all those who practise it do so as something unavoidable, against their will, and not because they regard it as a good. Thirdly I shall say that this is a rational way for them to behave, since the unjust man, in their view, has a much better life than the just man. These are not my own opinions, Socrates. But I am dismayed by the
d unending sound in my ears of Thrasymachus and thousands like him, whereas I have never yet heard from anyone, in the form I would like to hear it, the argument *for* justice, the argument that it is something better than injustice. I want to hear it praised simply for itself, and I have high hopes that you, if anyone, can do this for me. So I am going to make the most powerful speech I can in defence of the unjust life, and in my speech I shall show you how I want to hear you, in your turn, criticising injustice and defending justice. There you are. See if you approve of my suggestion.'

e 'I'd like nothing better,' I replied. 'What else would anyone with any sense prefer to make a habit of talking about or hearing about?'

'That's good,' he said. 'Now, listen to the first thing I said I was going to talk about – what sort of thing justice is, and how it arises. Doing wrong, men say, is by its nature a good – and being wronged an evil – but

the evil of being wronged outweighs the good of doing wrong. As a result,
359 when people wrong one another and are wronged by one another, and get a taste of both, those who are unable to avoid the one and achieve the other think it will pay them to come to an agreement with one another not to do wrong and not to be wronged. That's how they come to start making laws and agreements with one another, and calling lawful and just that which is laid down by the law. They say that this is the origin and essential nature of justice, that it is a compromise between the best case, which is doing wrong and getting away with it, and the worst case, which is being
b wronged and being unable to retaliate. Justice, being half-way between these two extremes, is not prized as a good; it finds its value merely in people's want of power to do wrong. The person who does have the power to do wrong – the true man – would never make an agreement with anyone not to do wrong and not to be wronged. It would be lunatic for him to do that. That, more or less, is the nature of justice, Socrates. That is what it is like, and those are the kinds of causes which gave rise to it, according to this theory.[1]

'As for the claim that people who practise justice do so reluctantly, being too weak to do wrong, the easiest way to see that it is true is to
c imagine something like this. Suppose we gave each of them – the just and the unjust – the freedom to do whatever he liked, and then followed them and kept an eye on them, to see which way his desire would take each of them. We would soon catch the just man out. Led on by greed and the desire to outdo others, he would follow the same course the unjust man follows, the course which it is everybody's natural inclination to pursue as a good, though they are forcibly redirected by the law into valuing
d equality. Roughly speaking, they would have the freedom I am talking about if they had the kind of power they say the ancestor of Gyges the Lydian once had. They say he was a shepherd, and that he was a serf of the man who was at that time the ruler of Lydia. One day there was a great rainstorm and an earthquake in the place where he grazed his sheep. Part of the ground opened up, and a great hole appeared in it. He was astonished when he saw it, but went down into it. And the legend has it that among many marvels he saw a hollow horse made of bronze, with

[1] The passage is an early appearance of the concept of a social contract imposed on a state of nature, which was to have great importance in the classic political and moral theories of the enlightenment. It is unclear whether Plato has any particular contemporary version of this concept in mind.

e windows in it. Peeping through them, he saw inside what appeared to be a corpse, larger than human, wearing nothing but a golden ring on its hand. They say he removed the ring, and came out.

'The shepherds were having one of their regular meetings, so that they could give the king their monthly report on the flocks. And the man turned up as well, wearing the ring. As he sat with the rest of them, he
360 happened to twist the setting of the ring towards him, into the palm of his hand. When he did this, he became invisible to those who were sitting with him, and they started talking about him as if he had gone. He was amazed, and twisted the ring again, turning the setting to the outside. As soon as he did so, he became visible. When he realised this, he started experimenting with the ring, to see if it did have this power. And he found that that was how it was. When he turned the setting to the inside, he became invisible; when he turned it to the outside, he became visible.
b Once he had established this, he lost no time arranging to be one of those making the report to the king. When he got there, he seduced the king's wife, plotted with her against the king, killed him and seized power.

'Imagine there were two rings like that, and that the just man wore one, while the unjust man wore the other. People think that no one would be sufficiently iron-willed to remain within the bounds of justice. No one could bring himself to keep his hands off other people's possessions, and steer clear of them, if he was free to take whatever he liked without a
c second thought, in the market-place, or go into people's houses and sleep with anyone he liked; or if he could kill or release from prison anyone he chose, and in general go round acting like a god among men. If he behaved like this, the just man would be acting no differently from the unjust. Both would be following the same course.

'This is a strong argument, you might say, for the claim that no one is just voluntarily, but only under compulsion. Justice is not thought to be
d a good thing for individuals, since wherever anyone thinks he *can* do wrong, he does do wrong. Every man believes injustice to be much more profitable for the individual than justice. And he will be right to think this, according to the person putting forward this view. Anyone who came into possession of the kind of freedom I have described, and then refused ever to do anything wrong, and did not lay a finger on other people's possessions, would be regarded by observers as the most pathetic and brainless of creatures – though of course in public they would praise him, lying to one another because of their fear of being wronged.

e 'That's all I have to say about that claim. As for the choice between the

lives of the people in question, the only way we can make it properly is by contrasting the completely just man with the completely unjust man. How shall we contrast them? Like this. We will subtract nothing either from the injustice of the unjust man or from the justice of the just man. We will assume that each is a perfect example of his particular way of behaving. So for a start let's make the unjust man's behaviour like that of a skilled practitioner of a profession. A really good ship's captain or
361 doctor, for example, can distinguish in the exercise of his skill between what is not feasible and what is feasible. He attempts what is feasible, and avoids what is not feasible. What is more, if he makes a false move somewhere, he is capable of correcting it. That's how it can be with our unjust man. Let's assume, if he is going to be *really* unjust, that he goes about his wrongdoings in the right way, and gets away with it. The one who gets caught is to be regarded as incompetent, since perfect injustice consists in appearing to be just when you are not. We must credit the completely unjust man, then, with the most complete injustice. To the person who
b commits the greatest wrongs we must not deny – in fact, we must grant – the enjoyment of the greatest reputation for justice. If he makes a false move, we must allow him the ability to put it right. He must be capable of using persuasion – so that if any evidence of his wrongdoings is brought against him, he can talk his way out of it – but capable also of using force where force is needed, relying on his courage and strength, and the possession of friends and wealth.

'That is our model of the unjust man. Beside him let us put our imaginary just man, a simple and honourable man who wants, in Aeschylus' words, not to appear to be good, but to be good.[2] We must deprive him of
c the appearance, since if he appears to be just, the appearance of justice will bring him recognition and rewards, and then it will not be clear whether his motive for being just was a desire for justice or a desire for the rewards and the recognition. So we must strip him of everything but justice; we must put him in a situation which is the opposite of our previous example. Despite doing nothing wrong, he must have the worst possible reputation for injustice. Then, if it is unaffected by disgrace and its consequences, the purity of his justice will have been tested in the fire. Let
d him live out his life like this, without any change, until the day of his death, appearing to be unjust though actually being just. That way they

[2] Part of the description (*Seven against Thebes* 592) of the wise and god-fearing seer Amphiaraus, explaining why he chooses to put no blazon on his shield.

can both attain the extreme – one of justice, the other of injustice – and the judgment can be made, which of them is happier.'

'Help!' I said. 'That's a pretty vigorous job you've done, my dear Glaucon, cleaning up each of our contestants to get them ready for judgment. Like scouring a statue.'

'I've done my best,' he said. 'And if both their situations are as I have described, it shouldn't be beyond us, I imagine, to give a full account of
e the kind of life which awaits each of them. So that is what I must do now. And if my language is rather crude and uncivilised, Socrates, don't imagine it's me talking. No, it's the people who recommend injustice in preference to justice. They will claim that in this situation the just man will be whipped and put on the rack, will be thrown into chains and have
362 his eyes burnt out. Finally, after all these injuries, he will be crucified, and realise that the important thing to aim for is not *being* just, but *appearing* to be just.[3] So what Aeschylus said turns out to be a much more accurate description of the unjust man, who wants not to appear to be unjust, but to be unjust, living his life in touch with reality rather than trying to satisfy appearances and public opinion,

> In his mind enjoying the deep furrow's fruit,
> b From which good counsel grows.[4]

In the first place, they will say, he can be a ruler in his city, because of his reputation for justice; secondly, he can marry where he likes, give his daughters in marriage to whom he chooses, and make contracts and partnerships with anyone he wishes. Besides all this he finds it easy to make himself a rich man, since he has no compunction about acting unjustly. That is why, they say, he is successful in political and legal disputes – both
c public and private – and why he gets the better of his enemies. By getting the better of them he grows rich, and can help his friends and harm his enemies. He can make full and generous sacrifices and offerings to the gods, and is much better able than the just man to serve the gods and that part of mankind whom he chooses to serve. As a result, they claim, he is

[3] Glaucon is exaggerating. Although a type of crucifixion was one of the methods by which criminals were executed in Athens, torture and mutilation was not a standard form of punishment. It is rather what a tyrant would inflict on his enemies.

[4] These lines are also part of the description of Amphiaraus and follow on immediately from the line adapted (but not directly quoted) at 361b. In their original context they referred to his intelligence and his attempt to prevent bloodshed between the two brothers Eteocles and Polynices; in their new context the 'good counsel' becomes the careful scheming of the unjust man.

in all probability more likely than the just man to be the gods' favourite. Those are the ways, Socrates, in which they say the unjust man gets a better deal, both from gods and men, than the just man.'

d When Glaucon finished, I was all set to reply. But his brother Adeimantus intervened. 'I hope you don't think, Socrates,' he said, 'that that is the whole of their case.'

'Why? What more is there?' I asked.

'We have left out the part,' he said, 'which most needs to be included.'

'Well,' I said, 'let brother stand by brother, as the saying goes.[5] By all means join in, and come to his assistance, if he has left anything out – though as far as I am concerned, even what he did say was enough to throw me, and make me incapable of coming to the defence of justice.'

e 'Nonsense,' he said. 'You must listen to this second instalment as well. To make it clearer what I think Glaucon wants, we must go through the contrary arguments to his – the ones which recommend justice and
363 criticise injustice. Fathers giving advice to their sons, and all those who are responsible for others, encourage them to be just – not, I take it, because they value justice by itself, but because they value the approval it brings. If they appear to be just, they argue, then this reputation will bring them public office, marriage and all the benefits Glaucon has just enumerated, which the just man gains from being well thought of. And that isn't all they have to say about the benefits of reputation. Once they start adding in the approval of the gods, they have an abundance of rewards to
b offer the pious – gifts of the gods, they say. The admirable Hesiod and Homer[6] say the same thing. Hesiod says that for the just, the gods make oak trees

> Bear acorns on their lofty tops, and bees
> Beneath, on lower branches. Weight of wool
> Burdens their fleecy sheep.

And many other benefits of the same kind.[7] Homer says much the same:

[5] Not a proverb attested before Plato. A contemporary variant runs: 'There is pardon for helping a brother.'

[6] As authors of the Greeks' most ancient poems describing their gods, Hesiod and Homer functioned as theological authorities.

[7] *Works and Days* 232–234. The other benefits mentioned by Hesiod are: absence of war and famine, women bearing children who are like their fathers, abundance rendering trade by sea unnecessary.

Or like some worthy king who, fearing god,
Supports the right. For him the rich dark earth
c Bears wheat and barley, while with fruit his trees
Bow down. Unfailingly his flocks bear lambs.
For him the sea yields fish.[8]

Musaeus and his son make the just receive rewards of a more exciting kind from the gods.[9] In their account, they conduct them to Hades, sit
d them down, and organise a party for the pious. They crown them, and make them spend the whole of time getting drunk, regarding perpetual drunkenness as the finest reward for human goodness. Others again grant rewards from the gods which are more extensive even than these. They say that children's children and a tribe of descendants are the posterity of the pious man, the man who keeps his oaths. That, and some more like it, is what they say in praise of justice. As for the impious and unjust, they
e bury them in Hades, in mud of some kind. They make them carry water in a sieve;[10] and they bring them into disgrace while they are still alive. They impose on the unjust all Glaucon's list of penalties for those just people who have the reputation of being unjust; these are all the penalties they can think of. That, then, is their recommendation and criticism of each of the two ways of life.

'Apart from that, Socrates, you should take into account another common way of talking about justice and injustice – both in everyday
364 speech and in the poets. In their praise of self-discipline and justice, they all sing with one voice. They regard them as a good, but as one which is difficult and laborious, whereas self-indulgence and injustice are pleasant and easy to follow; they are shameful only in the reputation they bring, and by convention. They say that for the most part unjust actions are more profitable than just ones. They are quite happy to congratulate the

[8] *Odyssey* 19.109–113, omitting line 110 ('and ruling over many powerful men'), and breaking off in mid-sentence ('. . . yields fish because of his good leadership, and under him his people flourish').

[9] A reference to 'mystic' cults and their associated body of poetry – cults which distinguished themselves from the common run of religious ritual by requiring a special regimen and/or purificatory initiation in this life in order to gain rewards in the afterlife. By Musaeus' son is probably meant Eumolpus, founder of the clan which had charge of the most famous of the mystic rites engaged in by Athenians – the Eleusinian. For general information on these cults see W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), ch. 6.

[10] The traditional punishment of the daughters of Danaus. In the *Gorgias* (493a–c) their fate is used as an allegory for the consequences of self-indulgence in the absence of purificatory initiation.

wicked, if they possess wealth and exercise power, and to pay them
b respect in both public life and private life. The others they despise and ignore – any of them who are weak and poor – though they admit they are better people than the wicked. However, the most remarkable statements of all on this subject are those about the attitude of the gods to human goodness. They say the gods give many good people unhappiness and a wretched life, while to their opposites they give a life which is quite different. Mendicant priests and seers knock at the rich man's door, and try
c to persuade him that they have a power, bestowed on them by the gods in return for sacrifices and incantations, to use the delights of feasting to put right any wrong done by him or his ancestors.[11] And that if anyone wants to harm an enemy, for a small charge they can injure just and unjust alike with charms and spells. They say they can persuade the gods to act for them. To all these claims they call the poets as witnesses. Some quote them on the ease of wrongdoing.

> There is much wickedness; it is never hard
> d To make that choice. The way is smooth, the goal
> Lies near at hand. Virtue is out of reach
> Without much toil. That is the gods' decree.[12]

It's a long, uphill road. Others, talking about the way men can influence the gods, call Homer to witness, with his claim that

> Even the gods themselves
> Will hear our prayers. Men who do wrong, and sin,
> e Can thus dissuade them from their purposes
> With fair entreaty or with sacrifice,
> With incense or the fat of offered meat.[13]

They bring forward a host of books by Musaeus and Orpheus, the children of Selene and the Muses, so they claim. These are what govern their sacrificial rituals, and they persuade cities as well as individuals that sacrifices and pleasurable amusements can win release and purification
365 from injustice both for those still alive and for those who have passed

[11] The victims of animal sacrifice in Greek religious ritual were made the centrepiece of a feast.

[12] Hesiod, *Works and Days* 287–289. Hesiod goes on to mitigate the 'long, uphill road' with the thought that once you get to the top it becomes easy to follow.

[13] The words spoken to Achilles by his childhood guardian Phoenix in *Iliad* 9.497–501, omitting line 498: '[the gods] who are our superiors in excellence, honour and might'.

away. Passing through the rites, they call it, which can release us from evils in the afterlife. And if we don't sacrifice, then horrors await us.

'That's the nature and force, Socrates, of all the things that are said about goodness and wickedness, and the value put on them by men and gods. What effect do we think they have on the minds of the young when they hear them – the able ones, those capable of flitting, as it were, from b opinion to opinion, gathering information on what sort of person to be, and which way to go, in order to live the best possible life? A young man might well ask himself, using Pindar's words, "How climb the highest wall? Will justice help? Or devious deception?"[14] And so live my life to its end, in the safety of the citadel? To judge by the poets, if I am just without also seeming to be just, I can expect nothing out of it but hardship and clear loss. If I am unjust, but have gained a reputation for justice, then I c am promised a wonderful life. Therefore, since "Appearance," as the wise men have pointed out to me, "overpowers truth" and controls happiness,[15] I must turn all my attention to that. I must draw an exact likeness of goodness around myself, as a front and façade, bringing along behind it the wise Archilochus' crafty and subtle fox.[16]

'"The trouble with that," someone will say, "is that it is hard to be evil and get away with it for ever." "Well," we shall say, "nothing great was d ever easy. But if we are going to be happy, we must follow where the trail of our argument leads us. And to get away with it, we shall form secret clubs and societies,[17] and there are teachers of persuasion to give us the wisdom of the assembly and the lawcourts. With their help we shall sometimes use persuasion, and at other times force, and so come out on top without paying for it."

'"But it's impossible to use stealth or force against the gods." "Well, if the gods don't exist, or if they are not at all interested in men, why should e we in our turn be interested in keeping what we do a secret? If they *do* exist, and *are* interested in men, our only knowledge or hearsay of them comes from custom and the poets who sing of the gods' family histories.

[14] The quotation is adapted to fit seamlessly into the young man's thought. Other sources give us a fuller version of the fragment: 'How climb the highest wall? Will justice help the race of men that dwells on earth to scale it? Or devious deception? My mind is divided and cannot say for certain.'

[15] A fragment of a lost poem by Simonides.

[16] The cunning fox of animal fable was a frequent figure in the poems of Archilochus.

[17] In the absence of formal political parties, private clubs were important in launching the politically ambitious. In the fifth century they became notorious hives of oligarchic conspiracy against the institutions of democratic Athens.

But these are the writers who tell us that it is in the gods' nature to be moved and won over 'with fair entreaty and with sacrifice'.[18] We must either believe both the claims made by the poets or neither of them. And if we believe them, the best policy will be to act unjustly, and use the
366 proceeds to pay for sacrifices. If we act justly, we shall avoid punishment by the gods, but also lose the rewards of injustice, whereas if we are unjust we shall get the rewards, and by means of prayers when we overstep the mark and do wrong we can persuade the gods to let us off without penalty."

"'Ah, but we shall have to pay in the next world – either we ourselves or our descendants – for the wrongs we do here." "Not so, my friend," he
b will say, with a calculating air. "There is great power in the mystic rites, and the gods who give absolution. So say the greatest cities, and the children of the gods, those who become the poets and mouthpieces of the gods; they assure us these things are so."

'What reason remains, then, for us to choose justice in preference to the most complete injustice? If we can have injustice coupled with counterfeit respectability, then we shall be following our own inclinations in our dealings with gods and men alike, both in our lifetime and after our death. That is the opinion of most people and of the experts. In the light
c of all these arguments, Socrates, what could induce anyone with any force of personality, any financial resources, any physical strength or family connections, to be prepared to respect justice, rather than laugh when he hears it being recommended? If anyone can show that what we have said is false, and is fully satisfied that justice is a good thing, then I imagine he is very forgiving towards the unjust, and does not get angry with them.
d He knows that apart from those who are born with a kind of divine aversion to injustice, or who gain the knowledge to refrain from it, no one really wants to be just. People condemn injustice as a result of cowardice, or old age, or weakness of some other kind, and from an inability to practise it. It's quite obvious. The minute one of these people comes into a position of power, he immediately starts acting as unjustly as he possibly can.

'The reason for all this is simply the observation which prompted the two of us to inflict these long speeches on you, Socrates. It is this. There
e is no shortage of people like you, my admirable friend, who claim to be supporters of justice, starting with the heroes of early days, whose words

[18] Referring back to 364e.

have come down to us, right up to people of the present day. None of you has ever condemned injustice or recommended justice except in terms of the reputation, prestige and rewards they bring. Nobody has ever yet, either in poetry or in private discussion, given a sufficiently detailed account of each of them in itself, when it is present with its own force in the soul of the person possessing it, undetected by gods or by men. No one has shown that injustice is the greatest of the evils the soul has within it, or
367 that justice is the greatest good. If that were what you had all been saying right from the start, and if you had been persuading us from our earliest years, we would not now be keeping an eye on one another, to guard against injustice. Each man would be keeping an eye on himself, afraid that by doing wrong he might admit the greatest of evils to share his abode.

'This, Socrates, and perhaps even more than this, is what Thrasymachus, or anyone else for that matter, might say on the subject of
b justice and injustice. They assign the wrong value to each – a gross mistake, in my view. The reason – and I will be quite open with you – why I have set out their position as vigorously as I can is that I want to hear the opposite view from you. Don't just demonstrate to us by argument that justice is something more powerful than injustice.[19] Tell us what effect each of them has, just by itself, on the person possessing it, which makes one of them something bad and the other something good. You must strip them of their reputations, as Glaucon recommended. You must remove from each its true reputation, and give it a false reputation. Otherwise we
c shall say that you are not defending justice, but the appearance of justice, and that you are not condemning injustice, but the appearance of injustice. We shall say you are encouraging us to be secretly unjust, and that you agree with Thrasymachus when he says that justice is what is good for someone else – what is good for the stronger – whereas injustice is what is good and profitable for oneself – what is bad for the weaker. You agreed that justice was one of those great goods which are worth having partly for their consequences, but much more so for their own sake,
d goods such as sight, hearing, intelligence – and health, for that matter – and the rest of that finest class of goods, those which are good by their very nature, and not because of the reputation they bring.[20] That is the

[19] As in the argument with Thrasymachus (351a).

[20] The Greek is ambiguous, and could also mean 'and the rest of that class of goods which are productive by their very nature, and not because of the reputation they bring'.

praise of justice I want you to make. Just by itself, how does it help – and how does injustice harm – the person who possesses it? You can leave the praise of rewards and reputation to others. I'm prepared to accept other people praising justice in these terms, and condemning injustice, and listen to them extolling or criticising the reputation and rewards associated with them. But I won't accept it from you, unless you tell me I must, since this is precisely the question you have spent your whole life
e studying. So please don't just demonstrate to us by argument that justice is something more powerful than injustice. Tell us the effect each of them has, just by itself, on the person possessing it – whether or not gods and men know about it – the effect which makes one of them good and the other bad.'