

# What Thrasymachus Should Have Said

Charles Pigden

## Abstract

In the *Republic* Thrasymachus argues that ‘justice is the advantage of the stronger’, that is, that the laws and conventions governing a society support the interests of the rulers or the ruling class. Hence acting justly – obeying those laws and customs of one’s society in one’s dealings with other people – is not necessarily, not usually or maybe not even *ever* in an agent’s best interests. This is a problem for Plato who wants to prove that it necessarily pays to be just (though as the *Republic* unfolds, he turns out to have a rather rarefied conception of self-interest as well as a rather rarefied conception of justice). So his spokesman, Socrates, leads Thrasymachus into a trap. Suppose (as surely happens from time to time) the rulers make a mistake and enact laws (or foster customs) that are not in their best interests. In that case justice won’t be to ‘the advantage of the stronger’ and their subjects’ acting justly won’t be in the rulers’ best interests. Clitophon offers Thrasymachus a lifeline. Perhaps justice is what the stronger *think* is in their interests. But Thrasymachus won’t have a bar of it. If a ruler makes a law or issues an order that is *not* in his interests, he thereby ceases to be a real ruler. So justice is always to the advantage of the stronger, since if it isn’t, the stronger cease to be strong. This is both decidedly silly and gets him into a lot of dialectical trouble. I suggest on Thrasymachus’ behalf a Darwinian response which entails that justice is *usually* or at least *often* to ‘the advantage of the stronger’. This in turn entails that it does not necessarily pay to be just, which negates Plato’s desired conclusion. Indeed, for many people it pays better to be relativistically *unjust*, that is *not* to have a settled commitment to obeying the norms of one’s society. My reconstructed Thrasymachus will be less of a proto-fascist and more of a radical democrat than Plato’s Thrasymachus appears to have been.

**Keywords:** Plato, Thrasymachus, Clitophon, Socrates, justice, injustice, happiness, advantage, the stronger, exploitation, subordination, relativism, Marx, power, professionals, rulers, ruling classes, mistakes and Adam Smith

*[That] the good is the satisfaction of the desires of the holders of power... is the theory advanced by Thrasymachus in the Republic, and 'refuted' by the Platonic Socrates with a dose of dishonest sophistry which is large even for him. (Russell (1944) 'Reply to Criticisms' pp. 722–723.)*

### **1. Cross-examining Plato: Necromancy and Anachronism**

For me the history of philosophy is a necromantic art. The idea is to resurrect the mighty dead in order to get into an argument with them in the belief that they are either importantly right or interestingly wrong. In this case the great shade is Plato and I shall be arguing that he is interestingly wrong, and wrong too about some important moral and political issues. It does not necessarily pay (in terms human happiness) to be just – indeed it often pays better to be *unjust*. Moreover, this holds given *any* plausible conceptions of justice and injustice. Hence if you want to persuade people to be just (in some sense) this can't be because it can be guaranteed to pay, at least, not in terms of personal happiness. Some readers may be put off by my 'show-no-mercy' approach to Plato. But Plato has had the benefit of every conceivable doubt for over 2000 years and, in my opinion, it is high time to be a bit less charitable. Besides these are serious issues. 'Do you think it a small matter [asks Socrates, rhetorically] to determine which whole way of life would make living most worthwhile for each of us?' (*Republic*, 344e.) Socrates is right. These are indeed serious issues and if we are to discuss them seriously, we need to take a seriously critical attitude even to the pronouncements of Plato. For the same reason I shall not be fighting shy of anachronism. If Plato has something to teach us it must withstand the test of time, a test which sometimes takes the form of anachronistic counterarguments and counterexamples.

### **2. The Point of the Republic: What is Plato Trying to Prove?**

What is the principal point of the *Republic*? To prove that it pays to be just. Plato is not just trying to prove the relatively uncontroversial point that it pays (on the whole) for *most* members of the community if *most* of them are just. That Protagorean platitude is not good enough for him. What he wants to prove is that it pays *each individual* in terms of *that individual's self-interest* to be just (though as the *Republic* progresses it turns out that he has a rather rarefied conception of justice as well as a rarefied conception of self-interest). But there are three different claims that need to be distinguished here:

- (P1) It *usually* pays to be just
- (P2) It *always* pays to be just

## What Thrasymachus Should Have Said

(P3) It *necessarily* pays to be just.

The third thesis implies the first two, but not the first two the third. If it *necessarily* pays to be just then it *always* pays to be just. And if it *always* pays to be just, then it *usually* pays to be just. But if it *usually* pays to be just it doesn't follow that it *always* pays to be just. And if it *always* pays to be just it doesn't follow that it *necessarily* pays to be just. Plato wants to prove (P3) and hence (P2) and (P1). Indeed, as the 'challenges' of Glaucon and Adeimantus in Book 2 make clear, Plato wants to prove something even stronger, namely

(P4) Justice necessarily pays *better* than any alternative strategy.

But there is a certain ambiguity here with respect to (P3): Is Plato trying to prove

(P3a) that it necessarily pays the just individual, in terms of his own happiness, to be just, that is, to have settled policy of behaving justly?

Or is he trying to prove the following?

(P3b) that it necessarily pays the just individual, in terms of his own happiness, to be just, where being just involves *having a certain set of psychic characteristics* such that *necessarily* somebody has a settled policy of behaving justly if and only if they have these characteristics.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> There is a notorious problem with Plato's argument in the *Republic* that has been widely discussed since the 1960s. In Book 2 Glaucon and Adeimantus challenge Socrates to prove that being just is intrinsically beneficial to the just agent irrespective of its usual effects, that is, that it pays to be just *necessarily* and *no matter what*. The context suggests that what they have in mind by *being just* is what might be called *behavioural justice*, that is, doing and being disposed to do the just thing by other people. But what Socrates *argues* (especially in Book 4) is that it pays *necessarily* and *no matter what* to have *psychic justice*, that is, a soul organised along the lines of Plato's not-very-appetising ideal city. This is not a very plausible thesis ('bat-shit crazy' some might say) but the real problem is that it is beside the point. Even if we grant Socrates' rather bizarre claim that it pays *necessarily* and *no matter what* to have *psychic justice*, this does not show that it pays *necessarily* and *no matter what* to be *behaviourally* just. To plug the gap in his argument, Plato needs to show that it is impossible to be behaviourally just without having psychic justice and that it is impossible to have psychic justice without being behaviourally just. Arguments for these distinctly dubious claims can perhaps be extracted from the *Republic* but they are not very convincing. What compounds the problem is that Plato's overall argument seems to imply that only a fortunate few can achieve psychic justice, since only a fortunate few can have access to the Forms. Thus, in so far as most people can approximate behavioural justice

The answer, I think, is that he comes on like somebody trying to prove (P3a), but ends up with an argument for the far less plausible (P3b). However, I shall set aside these complications for the moment and shall assume that it is (P3a) that Plato is arguing for.

Now, if (P1) is false – if it doesn't *usually* pay to be just – then (P2) is false. And if (P2) is false – if it does not *always* pay to be just – then (P3) is false – that is, it does not *necessarily* pay to be just. It is harder to refute (P1) than it is to refute either (P2) or (P3). To refute (P1) it is not good enough simply to show that it *sometimes* pays not to be just. You have to show that it doesn't *usually* pay to be just, that on the whole people are losers by their commitment to justice. However, to refute (P2) – that is that it *always* pays to be just – all you have to show is that *sometimes* it doesn't. It is even easier to refute (P3). All you have to show is that it *might not* pay to be just.

### 3. Justice and Injustice:

#### a Dilemma for the Fair-Weather Friends of Virtue

To be just is to be *systematically committed* to justice. Aquinas' definition sums up an entire tradition. Justice is a 'habit whereby a man renders to each one of his due by a constant and perpetual will'; 'perpetual' because the just man wills always to do what is just, and 'constant' in that he always wills to do what is just. That is, 'the *perpetual will* denotes the purpose of observing justice always, *constant* signifies a firm perseverance in this purpose'. (*Summa Theologica*, II–II, Q 58, 1) But this definition has consequences which are often ignored. To be unjust is simply *not* to be just; that is, to *lack* this habit. Thus, being unjust consists in *not* having a systematic commitment to acting justly; it is equivalent to *not* having a constant and perpetual will to give each one their due. But being *unjust* does NOT entail having a systematic commitment to behaving *unjustly*. Being unjust is not even having a systematic commitment to behaving unjustly *when you think you can get away with it*. Injustice is simply the *negation* of justice, not its opposite. People sometimes write as if being unjust consists in having a constant and perpetual will to give each one the *opposite* of their due. It is as if the unjust people are like Dr Evil in the *Austin Powers* movies or like Shakespeare's Aaron in *Titus Andronicus* (5.1):

---

– for instance by being disposed to do the just thing *most* of the time – it won't be in their interests *necessarily* and *no matter what*. *Approximate behavioural justice* will be good only because of its usual effects, whilst genuine psychic/behavioural justice will be effectively off the table for the vast majority of mankind. See for instance, Sachs (1963) 'A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic*', (just the one Professor Sachs?) Demos (1964) 'A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic*?', Vlastos (1973) 'Justice and Happiness in the *Republic*' and Pappas (2003) *Plato and the Republic*, ch. 5.

**Lucius**

Art thou not sorry for these heinous deeds?

**Aaron**

Ay, that I had not done a thousand more.  
Even now I curse the day—and yet, I think,  
Few come within the compass of my curse,—  
Wherein I did not some notorious ill,  
As kill a man, or else devise his death,  
Ravish a maid, or plot the way to do it,  
Accuse some innocent and forswear myself,  
Set deadly enmity between two friends,  
Make poor men's cattle break their necks;  
Set fire on barns and hay-stacks in the night,  
And bid the owners quench them with their tears.

But being unjust does not consist in being systematically committed to acting *unjustly*: it simply consists in *not* being systematically committed to acting *justly*. I make this point<sup>2</sup> to defuse a sophisticated line of argument that is often deployed by the friends of virtue, not excluding Plato himself [for example, *Republic*, 351–352].

(I) It does not pay to be systematically unjust (for example to adopt the policy of doing unjust thing whenever you think that you can get away with it).

(II) Therefore it does not pay to be unjust.

(III) Therefore it pays to be just.

Given the above definition of injustice this line of argument is obviously fallacious. Indeed, we can construct a dilemma for the friends of justice, (or at least for justice's fair-weather friends who are only committed to justice in so far as it can be made to pay).

If injustice is defined as a *systematic* commitment to acting unjustly then (II) follows from (I). If to be unjust is to be systematically unjust and if systematic injustice does not pay, then it does not pay to be unjust. But in that case, (III) does not follow from (II). It may not pay to be unjust but this does not prove that it pays to be just (that is to have a systematic commitment to behaving justly). If we define injustice simply as not having a settled commitment to behaving justly, then (III) follows from (II). If it does not pay

---

<sup>2</sup> A point I have made before, See Pigden (1988).

not to have a systematic commitment to behaving justly, then it *does* pay to have a systematic commitment to behaving justly. But in that case (II) does not follow from (I). Just because it does not pay to be *systematically* unjust, it does not follow that it does not pay to be unjust. So on one definition of injustice, (II) follows from (I) but (III) does not follow from (II). On the other definition of injustice, (III) follows from (II) but (II) does not follow from (I). Either way, the argument fails.

#### 4. Contrasting Plato and Aristotle

Plato wants to prove (1) that it usually pays to be just, (2) that it always pays to be just and (3) that it necessarily pays to be just. Aristotle, I suggest only wants to prove (1) and only wants to prove *that* for *some people* (namely upper-class Greek men). Thus Aristotle, as I read him, is making two claims:

(1#) It usually pays *for upper class Greek men* to be just where being just involves having a settled policy of giving to each one their due, so long as what is 'due' to people is determined by the laws and customs of a reasonably just society (one favouring the interests of upper-class Greek males). [This is, I think, a plausible proposition. Such a person is likely to find fulfilment in fulfilling what Aristotle sees as his function in a certain kind of 'natural' social whole.]

(1##) This is a sufficient reason *for upper class Greek men* to be just (He probably thought that there are *no* life-strategies that can be *guaranteed* to pay, so the one that *usually* pays or *usually* pays *best* is the one to go for.)<sup>3</sup>

This gives Aristotle two advantages over Plato: (a) Aristotle, unlike Plato, can admit the possibility of tragedy. Things can go horribly wrong even for just people, and though they may be better placed than the unjust, when it comes to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, they are (so to speak) only sling-and-arrow-resistant not sling-and-arrow-proof. (This is the theme of Nussbaum's superb book *The Fragility of Goodness*, especially the chapter on *Hecuba*.) (b) Aristotle does not have to worry about Thrasymachus' point that justice is the advantage of the stronger, that is, that

---

<sup>3</sup> Of course, an individual member of a ruling class may do better by violating the norms of his caste and either redistributing power downwards (like Cleisthenes or Ephialtes in Athens) or aggrandising it for himself (like Caesar in Rome). Both were probably condemned as class traitors and therefore as 'unjust' by their peers. But from the point of view of personal happiness, these are high-risk strategies. Witness the fates of the Gracchi on the one hand and of Caesar himself on the other.

## What Thrasymachus Should Have Said

laws and institutions systematically favour the interests of the ruling class, since the people he is addressing are *members* of the ruling class (a class that is fitted by nature to rule). Hence no mention of Thrasymachus<sup>4</sup>.

### 5. Enter Thrasymachus

Thrasymachus develops a *relativistic* conception of justice which, when combined with a bit of political sociology, poses a problem for Plato's thesis that it necessarily pays to be just. Here is what I think of as his first argument:

#### *Thrasymachus' First Argument*

##### **Thesis:**

Listen, then. I say that justice is *nothing other* [my italics] than the advantage of the stronger.

##### **Argument :**

(T1) Some cities are ruled by a tyranny, some by a democracy, and some by an aristocracy.

(T2) And in each city this element is stronger, namely, the ruler [Query: *the ruler or the ruling class, caste or group?*]

(T3) And each makes laws to its own advantage. Democracy makes democratic laws, tyranny makes tyrannical laws, and so on with the others. And they declare what they have made—what is to their own advantage—to be just for their subjects, and they punish anyone who goes against this as lawless and unjust.

(T4) This, then, is what I say justice is, the same in all cities, the advantage of the established rule. Since the established rule is surely stronger, anyone who reasons correctly will conclude that the just is the same everywhere, namely, the advantage of the stronger. [Republic, 338d–339a.]

Here is an *Analytical Reconstruction*:

(T1\*) *Nominalism*: There is nothing more to justice than what is commonly accepted as such.

---

<sup>4</sup> At least not in his moral or political works, though Aristotle takes Thrasymachus seriously as a rhetorician. In the *Politics* a 'Thrasymachus' is mentioned as overthrowing the democracy of Cyme, but since Plato's Thrasymachus was a sophist and a native of Chalcedon who appears to have spent most of his career at Athens, the anti-democratic politician was presumably a different person.

(T2\*) *Relativistic Definition*: To be just is to have a settled disposition to give each one his or her due **according to the laws, customs and moral codes of one's society**.

Thus, what is due to a master from a slave might be deference, obedience, unpaid labour and maybe sexual services<sup>5</sup>, and what is due to an impudent slave from her master might be a beating. What is due to an oligarch in an oligarchic society might be obedience on the part of non-oligarchs and respect for the property rights that the oligarch has acquired by force, fraud and exploitation. What is due to a law-abiding metic such as Cephalus under the Athenian Democracy is the profits of his arms manufacturing business (even though it is largely conducted by slave labour) plus respect for his person and property rights. What is due to his son Polemachus under the Thirty is death and despoliation<sup>6</sup>. What is due from a wife to her husband in a sexist society might be obedience. What is due to an employer from a worker in a 'bourgeois' society is the work he is paid to do, however exploitative the terms and conditions of his employment may be. What is due from a citizen towards the Party in a Communist Society is deference to the decisions of the Politburo and a profound respect for the 'immortal classics' of Marxism-Leninism. What is due from an aristocrat to the Athenian Democracy is deference to the decisions of the Ecclesia (with which he may well disagree) and perhaps a range of taxes that he might prefer not to pay. What is due to a tyrant under a tyrannical regime, is, well, whatever the tyrant wants.

(T3\*) *Sociological Thesis*: The laws and customs of a society subserve (and are designed to subserve) the interests of the rulers, the ruling class or the ruler (the stronger).

(T4\*) Therefore being just involves following laws and customs that subserve the interests of the stronger.

(T5\*) Therefore being just is **nothing other** than subserving the interests of the stronger.

---

<sup>5</sup> Of course, it is usually *female* slaves who have to provide such services for their *male* masters but not always. 'Can there be a sorer or crueller practice than that whereby a boy is never, apparently, allowed to grow up into a man, in order that he may endure a man's attentions for as long as may be? Won't even his years rescue him from the indignity his sex ought to have precluded? Seneca (1969) *Letters from a Stoic*, Letter CXXII. Seneca deplores the slave-owners who subject their assets to such treatment but not the institution (slavery) that enables them to do so. 'So you needn't allow yourself to be deterred by the snobbish people I've been talking about from showing good humour towards your slaves instead of adopting an attitude of arrogant superiority towards them. Have them respect you rather than fear you'. Letter XLVII. This, of course presupposes that 'they' remain slaves and that 'you' remain a master.

<sup>6</sup> See his brother Lysias's oration 'Against Eratosthenes', a first-hand account of what it is like to be the victim of a terrorist hit-squad.



## What Thrasymachus Should Have Said

But there is an ambiguity here. Should we read (T5\*) as (T5a\*) or (T5b\*)

(T5a\*) Being just *entails subserving* the interests of the stronger.  
(You cannot have a settled policy of acting justly without performing acts which subserve the interests of the stronger).

(T5b\*) Being just is *nothing but* subserving the interests of the stronger

Thrasymachus seems to want (T5b\*) but is only entitled to (T5a\*). (Thrasymachus, like many philosophers of a cynical cast of mind, is an enthusiastic patron of the Nothing Buttery.)

### 6. Thrasymachus, Marx and Russell

Thrasymachus' views have evident affinities with those of Marx and Engels. Here's *The Communist Manifesto* (1848):

The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class.

[Marx/Engels (1969) *Selected Works*, 1: p 125]

And here, at greater length, is *The German Ideology* (1845–6):

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. ... The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore think. Insofar, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch.

[Marx/Engels (1969) *Selected Works*, 1: p 47]<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> The parallels between Marx and Thrasymachus have seemed to me pretty obvious since I first started teaching a Plato-based course, a couple of decades ago. I find it hard to believe that I have not been anticipated, but thus far, despite a fair bit of scholarly Googling, I have not found anyone else who makes this precise point.

There are of course differences. To begin with Thrasymachus is talking about laws, customs and moral codes whilst Marx and Engels are talking about ideas in general. But since ideas translate themselves into laws and customs and moral codes, and since laws and customs are justified by ideas, especially *moral* ideas, perhaps this difference is not that important. Secondly Thrasymachus seems to think that the laws and moral codes of a society are *deliberately designed* by the rulers or the ruling classes to foster their interests. No doubt this sometimes happens. But Marx is surely right in thinking that the processes whereby a ruling class or a ruling group generates the laws, and ideologies that promote and perpetuate its power are often a lot less self-conscious (and a lot more constrained by preexisting conditions) than that. Here is Marx again, this time from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (though he is discussing the sequence of French Revolutions from 1789 till 1830):

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honoured disguise and borrowed language ... Unheroic as bourgeois society is, it nevertheless took heroism, sacrifice, terror, civil war and battles of peoples to bring it into being. And in the classically austere traditions of the Roman republic its gladiators found the ideals and the art forms, *the self-deceptions* that they needed in order *to conceal from themselves* [my italics] the bourgeois limitations of the content of their struggles and to keep their enthusiasm on the high plane of the great historical tragedy.

[Marx/Engels (1969) *Selected Works*, 1: p 398]

There is a lot to quibble with in Marx's conception of the way that laws and ideologies are developed and perpetuated so as to bolster the power of the rulers. (For a start it is unduly tainted by Hegelian teleology.) But Marx is surely right in thinking that the process is often a lot less self-conscious than Thrasymachus makes it out to be, and that it may involve substantial dollops

## What Thrasymachus Should Have Said

of self-deception. If your political schtick consists in persuading the poor to vote against their interests in the service of the 1%, you may well be more effective (as well as feeling a lot happier about yourself) if you do not believe that your political schtick consists in persuading the poor to vote against their interests in the service of the 1%. If your actual project is to maximise your power and privilege as a Party apparatchik, you may well be happier *and perhaps more effective* if you genuinely believe that you are a dedicated servant of the workers' cause. If your object is to subordinate your functional equals and to exploit them as slave-labour it probably pays if you sincerely believe that they are natural slaves and that slavery is good for them. (Of course, you really hit the jackpot if you can persuade *the slaves* that they are natural slaves and that slavery is good for them, but, generally speaking, that is a bit of a stretch.) In *Freedom and Organisation* (1938) Russell remarks that 'in the eighteenth century French aristocrats mostly became free-thinkers [but] now their descendants are mostly Catholics, because it has become necessary for all the forces of reaction to unite against the revolutionary proletariat'. Russell is not of course suggesting that the resurgence of Catholicism amongst latter-day French aristocrats was due to a *conscious* calculation of political advantage. Indeed he goes on to stress that the purveyors of self-serving and oppressive ideologies often sincerely believe in the ideologies that they profess. If people are trying to secure their powers and privileges either through legislation or by propagating a false and oppressive ideology, they will often be more effective (and better able to live with themselves) if they do not consciously believe that that is what they are trying to do.

Marx's observation – that 'men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past' – applies in particular to ruling individuals, cliques or classes developing laws, codes and ideologies that perpetuate their powers and privileges. It isn't very often that these can be invented out of the whole cloth. Not many rulers or ruling groups are in a position to implement a 'Year Zero' in which preexisting ideas and codes can simply be junked and society refashioned anew. (And when the 'stronger' *think* that they are in such a position, the results are usually horrific.) To paraphrase Donald Rumsfeld, 'You go to the development of self-serving laws, codes and ideologies with what you've got'<sup>8</sup>. This can create problems for the rulers and ruling classes in question. Christianity is a radically egalitarian religion, since it claims that

---

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.wired.com/2013/05/rumsfelds-rules/>.

we are all equally the children of God, and that lords and popes, emperors and princes are, in the end, only men, who are just as subject to God's commands and God's judgement as everybody else (if not, more so). But since the era of Constantine, Christianity has been co-opted to justify radically *unequal* social orders. Witness this (now usually suppressed) verse of Cecil Frances Alexander's 1848 hymn *All Things Bright and Beautiful*:

The rich man in his castle,  
The poor man at his gate,  
God made them, high or lowly,  
And ordered their estate.

Mrs Alexander's implication would appear to be that if 'the poor man at his gate' (let alone the homeless man without a gate of his own) tries to rebel against his lowly estate, he will be rebelling against the God who ordered that estate in the first place. But although Christianity has been successfully employed to justify highly unequal polities, there is always the risk of the old egalitarian Adam breaking out:

When Adam delved and Eve span,  
Who was then the gentleman?<sup>9</sup>

Finally, there is the problem that what favours the 'stronger' in the short-term may be adverse to their interests in the long-term. It is difficult to come up with clear and uncontentious examples concerning codes, but it is easy to come up with examples featuring ideals. In the *Eighteenth Brumaire* Marx suggests that during the Second French Republic the 'Party of Order' (composed of 'bourgeois' Republicans and the partisans of the two rival branches of the deposed Bourbon dynasty) systematically undermined liberal and democratic principles and justified the use of military force in order to defend themselves against the threat of socialism as personified by the

---

<sup>9</sup> The lines come from the speech of the radical priest John Ball at the time of the Peasant's Revolt in 1381. 'When Adam delved and Eve span, Who was then the gentleman? From the beginning all men by nature were created alike, and our bondage or servitude came in by the unjust oppression of naughty men. For if God would have had any bondmen from the beginning, He would have appointed who should be bond, and who free. And therefore I exhort you to consider that now the time is come, appointed to us by God, in which ye may (if ye will) cast off the yoke of bondage, and recover liberty'. [[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Ball\\_\(priest\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Ball_(priest))] Or, in Platonic paraphrase: '*God made men and women equal; evil men made them unequal; hence what passes for justice is the advantage the stronger and there is no need to be conventionally just or to obey your "betters"*'. Ball was hung, drawn and quartered for his pains.

Parisian proletariat. Thus they could not appeal to such principles when the time came to defend themselves against the coup of Napoleon III:

During the June days all classes and parties had united in the party of Order against the proletarian class as the party of anarchy, of socialism, of communism. They had “saved” society from “the enemies of society.” They had given out the watchwords of the old society, “property, family, religion, order,” to their army as passwords and had proclaimed to the counterrevolutionary crusaders: “In this sign thou shalt conquer!” From that moment, as soon as one of the numerous parties which gathered under this sign against the June insurgents seeks to hold the revolutionary battlefield in its own class interest, it goes down before the cry: “property, family, religion, order.” Society is saved just as often as the circle of its rulers contracts, as a more exclusive interest is maintained against a wider one. Every demand of the simplest bourgeois financial reform, of the most ordinary liberalism, of the most formal republicanism, of the most shallow democracy, is simultaneously castigated as an “attempt on society” and stigmatized as “socialism.” And finally the high priests of “religion and order” themselves are driven with kicks from their Pythian tripods, hauled out of their beds in the darkness of night, put in prison vans, thrown into dungeons or sent into exile; their temple is razed to the ground, their mouths are sealed, their pens broken, their law torn to pieces in the name of religion, of property, of the family, of order.

[Marx/Engels (1969) *Selected Works*, 1: p 406]

By pushing an ideology of religion, property and the family at the expense of liberal and democratic principles, the Party of Order preserved themselves from the Parisian proletariat in the short-term only to succumb to a Bonapartist coup a few years later.<sup>10</sup>

## 7. Thrasymachus’ Argument Resumed

We left Thrasymachus with the sociological claim that justice is the advantage of the stronger. But of course, Thrasymachus isn’t just doing

---

<sup>10</sup> Of course, Marx’s overall thesis is that a combination of self-interest and class-interest compels the bourgeoisie to pursue a set of policies – including moral and political policies – that will ultimately lead to their downfall as a class. But though he was probably right about the Party of Order during the Second French Republic, he has thus far proved to be wrong about the fate of the bourgeoisie in the Nineteenth, Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries.

sociology or political analysis. He has a point to prove, namely that it does not pay to be just.

***Thrasymachus' Second Argument***

(T5) You are so far from understanding about justice and what's just, about injustice and what's unjust, that you don't realize that justice is really the good of another, the advantage of the stronger and the ruler, and harmful to the one who obeys and serves. Injustice is the opposite, it rules the truly simple and just, and those it rules do what is to the advantage of the other and stronger, and they make the one they serve happy, but themselves not at all. [*Republic*, 343c]

(T6) Those who reproach injustice do so because they are afraid not of doing it but of suffering it. So, Socrates, injustice, if it is on a large enough scale, is stronger, freer, and more masterly than justice. And, as I said from the first, justice is what is advantageous to the stronger, while injustice is to one's own profit and advantage. [*Republic*, 344c]

Here's an analytical reconstruction (ignoring or downplaying Thrasymachus' proto-fascist leanings which are rather beside the point):

***Analytical Reconstruction (Thrasymachus' Second Argument)***

(T4\*) Being just involves following laws and customs that subserve the interests of the stronger.

(T5b\*) Being just is **nothing but** subserving the interests of the stronger.

(T6\*) Therefore being just does *not* serve the agent's own interests but *only* the interests of another (the stronger).

(T7\*) Therefore it is better, from a self-interested point of view, to be unjust rather than just, provided you can get away with it. ('Justice is what is advantageous to the stronger, while injustice is to one's own profit and advantage')

Note that (T7\*) only follows from (T6\*) if being unjust is simply equivalent to *not* being just. It does not follow (as Thrasymachus seems to think) if being unjust involves a Dr-Evil-like policy of *active* injustice, doing the unjust thing whenever it pays or appears to pay.

Putting the two arguments together what we get is the following:

**Analytical Reconstruction**

**(Thrasymachus' Two Arguments Combined)**

(T1\*) *Nominalism*: There is nothing more to justice than what is commonly accepted as such.

(T2\*) *Relativistic Definition*: To be just is to have settled disposition to give each one his or her due **according to the laws and customs of one's society**.

(T3\*) *Sociological Thesis*: The laws and customs of a society subserve (and are designed to subserve) the interests of the rulers, the ruling class or the ruler (the stronger).

(T4\*) Being just involves following laws and customs that subserve the interests of the stronger. [From (2\*) and (3\*).]

(T5b\*) Being just is **nothing but** subserving the interests of the stronger.

(T6\*) Therefore being just does *not* serve the agent's own interests but *only* the interests of another (the stronger).

(T7\*) Therefore it is better, from a self-interested point of view, to be unjust rather than just, provided you can get away with it. ('Justice is what is advantageous to the stronger, while injustice is to one's own profit and advantage') This does not mean that a policy of *active* injustice is better than a policy of *active* (and systematic) justice. What it does mean (despite Thrasymachus' tendencies to run away with himself and to push his position towards evil-be-thou-my-good extremes) is that *not* having a commitment to justice (which means being unjust in this sedate sense) pays better than having a *systematic* commitment to justice.

There are five points to note:

A) Thrasymachus' conclusion (T7\*) is inconsistent with what Plato wants to prove, namely that it necessarily pays to be just. For what it says is that it pays to be *unjust* if you can get away with it. Thus Thrasymachus poses a threat to Plato.

B) But the threat may not be as severe as all that since the transition from (T4\*) to (T5b\*) is decidedly dodgy. The conclusion that *being just is nothing but subserving the interests of the stronger* does not follow from the premise that *being just involves systematically following laws and customs that subserve the interests of the stronger*. It is possible for an action, a policy, a custom or a law *both* to subserve the interests of the stronger *and* to subserve the interests of the individual. This is obviously the case if the individual is

himself a member of the ruling class (which will be true of oligarchs in an oligarchy or most citizens in a democracy) or if he himself is a ruler. But it may still be the case even if he or she is not amongst the ‘strong’. Public health measures provide a case in point. It may very well be that the best way to protect the health of the patricians in their palaces is to promote the health of the plebs in their hovels, for instance by efficient sewage disposal, the provision of fresh water, and public vaccination programs. Thus measures designed to benefit the stronger may also benefit the not-so-strong. A slave owner may enforce a rigorous health and hygiene regime to protect the value of her assets. It may well be in the interests of those assets to follow her rules, and not simply because to do otherwise would result in a beating. In an oligarchy, a law-and-order regime primarily designed to protect the property-rights of the haute bourgeoisie may *also* promote the interests of the petty-bourgeoisie and maybe even the proletariat. As a number of critics have noted (for instance Rachel Barney (2006)) Thrasymachus seems to conceive of society as a zero sum game in which you cannot promote one person’s interests without doing down somebody else. Now, of course we can all agree that it is *often* the case in human societies that one person’s gain is another’s loss (and even perhaps that win/win situations are relatively rare) but, it is *also* sociologically obvious that, like the things that you’re liable to read in the Bible, this ain’t necessarily so. Though it is probably true that an individual who strictly adheres to the conventional code of justice will be benefiting those who make and enforce the conventions (that is, the stronger) it does not follow that none of that individual’s just acts will be in her own best interests. Justice may well be ‘the advantage of the stronger and the ruler’ but it does not follow that it is *always* ‘harmful to the one who obeys and serves’.

C) Although *on the whole*, the laws and customs that prevail within a society can be expected to favour the interests of ‘the stronger’ we have already seen three reasons why there might be some slippage:

- 1) In order to protect their egos, the rulers may be suffering from various forms of ideological self-delusion, often portraying themselves as a lot less ruthless and predatory than they appear to be to others. This opens up the possibility that because of ideological self-deception, they may prescribe or enforce rules or ideals of conduct that are *not* in their best interests as rulers. Here’s a way this might happen. The rulers are deeply convinced of their own benevolence and that the rules they prescribe are really in their subjects’ best interests. They are also convinced that they



## What Thrasymachus Should Have Said

are deeply loved. So when unrest breaks out because of these rules, they put it down to outside agitators and spend a lot of time trying to smoke them out rather than reforming the rules and redressing real grievances by making sensible concessions. Their unappeased subjects become more rebellious – and revolution ensues.

- 2) It is difficult to invent and impose an entirely new morality. Hence the moralities that prevail within a given society may contain elements that do not favour the interests of the *current* rulers.
- 3) Finally, what pays in the short term may be dangerous in the long term. It is not so much that the rulers have made a *mistake* with respect to the ethic that they prescribe but that they have failed to show sufficient foresight. Unintended consequences are notoriously difficult to predict ('It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future') and these include the unintended consequences of the moral codes that you may decide to foster.

D) Although Plato's Thrasymachus seems to have thought that the good life consists in exploiting and dominating others, all that he needs to challenge Plato is the much more modest thesis that *it is bad to be exploited and dominated*. In what follows I shall simply assume that it is bad (and not in anyone's best interests) to be physically, sexually or economically exploited, to be forced to work long hours for little or no pay, to live a life of drudgery and want, to be subject to a political system in which most people get next to nothing and a favoured few get all the wealth, to be subject to the will of another, to have to put up with the capricious freaks of lords and masters, to be subject to the threat or the actuality of arbitrary violence, to experience the daily humiliation of having to defer to and flatter those who consider themselves your betters, to be forced to fight in wars for the economic or psychological benefit of egomaniac princes, presidents and kings, and to have to keep a curb on one's tongue – or even on one's inner thoughts – for fear of the consequences of speaking freely. Hence a systematic habit of giving to each one what is conventionally their due – which often includes obedience, deference and subservience – is often *not* in a subject's best interests.

E) In the *Gorgias* Socrates argues roughly as follows. a) A power is not a genuine power unless it enables people to get what they really want. b) What everybody *really* wants is happiness. c) Politicians in general and tyrants in particular can only achieve happiness if they are first punished for their crimes. d) Thus avoiding punishment is not in a tyrant's or an unjust politician's best interests. e) The art of rhetoric [and the same would follow

for many of the other ‘arts’ which politicians and tyrants employ to bolster their rule] enables – and maybe even encourages – politicians and tyrants to evade just punishment. d) Thus the art of rhetoric does not enable them to get what they really want, namely happiness. e) Hence the art of rhetoric [and again the same would follow for the other arts which politicians and tyrants employ to bolster their rule] does not confer a genuine power. In the initial phases of the *Republic* and especially in the debate with Thrasymachus, Plato adopts less highfalutin conceptions of *power* and *interest* according to which rulers are genuinely powerful and it is in their interests to preserve their powers and privileges. I shall follow him in this.

### 8. Socrates’ Response

Plato is aware that Thrasymachus’s conclusion (T7\*) represents a threat to his position and he provides Socrates with an answer:

(S1) Haven’t we agreed that, in giving orders to their subjects, the rulers are sometimes in error as to what is best for themselves, and yet that it is just for their subjects to do whatever their rulers order? [*Republic*, 339d]

(S2) You have agreed that it is just to do what is disadvantageous to the rulers and those who are stronger, whenever they unintentionally order what is bad for themselves. But you also say that it is just for the others to obey the orders they give. [*Republic*, 339e]

(S3) The rulers sometimes order what is bad for themselves [and] it is just for the others to do it [*Republic*, 340a, Polemachus speaking, enlarging on Socrates’ argument].

(S4\*) Hence Justice isn’t [always] the advantage of the stronger.

(S5\*) *Unstated implication*: When this happens a just agent is *not* promoting the advantage of the stronger and *may* be acting in his own interests

(The starred propositions are not verbal quotations but clear implications of Socrates’s argument) Note, however, that even if we concede Socrates’ point, this is not enough to save Plato’s bacon. No doubt the stronger sometimes make mistakes, prescribing ideals or codes that are not to their advantage. (Indeed, we have seen several reasons for thinking that this happens.) Thus

## What Thrasymachus Should Have Said

those who systematically strive to live up to those ideals or to comply with those codes won't *always* be acting in the stronger's best interests. But it does not follow that they will be acting in their own best interests either, since the codes that the just religiously obey may be bad for them *without* being good for their rulers. A ruler may feel compelled to enforce an antiquated custom which once served some practical purpose but is nowadays harmful to both the rulers and the ruled. (There is win/win in human interactions but lose/lose also.) Nor does it follow that it will pay to be just when the rulers in your society are less accident-prone. So long as we admit that justice is *often* to the advantage of the stronger and that when it is, it is often *not* in the subject's best interests, then two things *do* follow: firstly that it does not *always* pay to be just and secondly that it does not *necessarily* pay to be just. And since Plato wants to prove the negations of *both* these claims, Thrasymachus will still have refuted him. Furthermore, the fact that rulers sometimes make mistakes, is quite consistent with the plausible sociological generalisation (which is all that his arguments support) that rulers and ruling classes *tend* to enforce laws and codes that are in their best interests where 'being in their best interests' means perpetuating their powers and privileges.) *Thus a smarter Thrasymachus would have simply conceded the point and replied that justice is usually the advantage of the stronger.* As for his thesis that injustice pays better than justice (if you can get away with it), if he had simply added some such qualifier as 'usually' he would have been in the clear. But Plato's Thrasymachus, unfortunately, does not see it that way and makes a dreadful *faux pas* in endeavouring to deal with Socrates' reply. But first he fends off a lifeline suggested by his reluctant disciple Clitophon<sup>11</sup>.

### 9. Clitophon's Lifeline

(C1) But, Clitophon responded, [Thrasymachus] said that the advantage of the stronger is what the stronger *believes* [italics added] to be his advantage. This is what the weaker must do, and this is what he maintained the just to be .... [*Republic*, 340b.]

(SC2) If Thrasymachus wants to put it that way now, let's accept it. Tell me, Thrasymachus, is this what you wanted to say the just is, namely, what the stronger believes to be to his advantage, whether it is

---

<sup>11</sup> For Clitophon's reluctant preference for Thrasymachus over Socrates, see the eponymous dialogue *Clitophon*. It makes sense as a genuinely Platonic dialogue on the assumption that at some stage Plato had come to feel that the historical Socrates had not satisfactorily explained either what justice is or why it is worth pursuing.

in fact to his advantage or not? [*Republic*, 340c, Socrates clarifying Clitophon's suggestion.]

So following the above reconstruction, Clitophon's suggestion is this. There is nothing more to justice than what is commonly accepted as such. To be just is to have a settled commitment to giving each one their due according to the laws and customs of one's society. The laws and customs of society are *designed* to subserve the interests of the stronger (the rulers or the ruling class) though they don't always do so. Thus being just involves systematically following laws and customs that are *designed* to subserve the interests of the stronger. Hence justice is what the stronger *believe* to be their advantage.

Now it isn't clear where Clitophon would like to go from here. But we can develop his argument in a way that poses a threat to Plato. Though the stronger sometimes make mistakes, what they *think* is in their best interests is often *actually* in their best interests. (And even when it isn't the rules they prescribe may not be in the interests of the ruled.) When a policy or custom is *actually* in the stronger's interests it is often *not* in the interests of the not-so-strong. This does not mean that every action prescribed by the custom is not in the interests of the non-strong but it does mean that a settled policy of doing the done thing is unlikely to pay. Sometimes, at any rate, being just – systematically observing the rules foisted on society by the strong – won't be in the individual's best interests. Thus it doesn't *always* pay to be just, which means that it doesn't *necessarily* pay to be just.

As we shall see Thrasymachus rejects Clitophon's suggestion. Was he right to do so? Yes and no. Both Thrasymachus and Clitophon seem to think that when it comes to imposing laws, customs and codes both rulers and ruling classes are rather more self-conscious and rather less historically constrained than they are in real life. Now it may be that political actors in Ancient Greece were less prone to ideological self-deception than political actors in subsequent eras. The speeches of politicians as reported in the major Greek historians (especially Thucydides) often display a rather startling degree of cynical self-awareness. But then Thucydides' speeches are not verbatim reports of what the actors actually said. In Woodruff's opinion Thucydides 'shows us [the actors'] speeches refracted through a lens of honesty', a lens that was often lacking in real life. [Woodruff (1993) 'Introduction' in Woodruff ed. *Thucydides on On Justice Power and Human Nature*, p. xxiii] In practice Greek politicians were probably not as honest, either with their audiences or with themselves. But although self-delusion is common in politics, there are surely *some* rulers who self-consciously pursue

their own interests or those of the classes to which they belong. When they do, they sometimes get it wrong, but they often get it right. Either way, the codes that they prescribe are often *not* in the long-term best interests of the ruled. In which case a systematic policy of following those codes won't *always* be – and hence won't necessarily be – in the subject's best interests. Plato is refuted.

### 10. Thrasymachus' Reply

Thrasymachus, however, won't have a bar of this. But why is he so resistant to Clitophon's sensible (if somewhat naive) suggestion? Because it might subvert his central argument. Suppose that rulers can make mistakes, prescribing rules, laws and customs that are *not* in their interests that is rules, laws and customs that do *not* perpetuate their powers and privileges. Then they *might* prescribe rules which are in the interests of the ruled rather than the rulers. Obeying such rules would not be to the advantage of the stronger but rather to the 'weak'. In which case being just might sometimes be a paying proposition after all. Thus he rejects Clitophon's suggestion with scorn.

(T7) Do you think I'd call someone who is in error stronger at the very moment he errs?

(T8) When someone makes an error in the treatment of patients, do you call him a doctor in regard to that very error? Or when someone makes an error in accounting, do you call him an accountant in regard to that very error in calculation? ... But each of these, insofar as he is what we call him, never errs, so that, according to the precise account no craftsman ever errs. It's when his knowledge fails him that he makes an error, and in regard to that error he is no craftsman.

(T9) No craftsman, expert, or ruler makes an error at the moment when he is ruling ... A ruler, insofar as he is a ruler, never makes errors and unerringly decrees what is best for himself, and this his subject must do. Thus, as I said from the first, it is just to do what is to the advantage of the stronger. [*Republic*, 340c–341a.]

This is a major shift in Thrasymachus's position (though not, perhaps one that he sticks to consistently). He starts off with the sociological, empirical, and therefore *contingent* thesis that rulers, ruling groups and ruling classes (where these categories are conceived in commonsensical terms) prescribe

laws and customs that are in their own best interests. When combined with the premise (which Socrates does not contest) that acting justly consists in systematically obeying the laws and customs of one's society, this entails that acting justly will be to the advantage the stronger (though it doesn't entail that it will *never* be to the subjects' advantage). But now Thrasymachus shifts to a set of rather implausible *conceptual* claims:

- (Ti) that ruling or being a ruler is a trade or profession analogous to other trades or professions;
- (Tii) that professionals temporarily cease to be professionals 'in the precise sense' whenever they make a mistake in their professional capacities;
- (Tiii) that the object of the trade of rulership is to exploit other people (and particularly one's subjects) for one's own advantage;
- (Tiv) that it is part of the profession of a ruler to enact and enforce laws and customs (which given (Tiii) will always be to their advantage, so long as they are rulers 'in the precise sense');
- and
- (Tv) that somebody does not count as 'strong' (or one of 'the stronger') unless he or she is a ruler in this 'precise' sense.

When combined with the thesis that *acting justly consists in obeying the laws and customs of one's society*, does all this entail that justice (acting justly) is *always* to the advantage of the stronger? That is what Thrasymachus appears to think and (considered as a character) this is probably why he rejects Clitophon's offer and makes what turns out to be a disastrous move. He does not want his central thesis that *justice is advantage of the stronger* to be a rough and ready claim, subject to empirical qualifications, but an exceptionless generalisation, to be established beyond doubt. We might almost say (rather anachronistically) that he wants it to be analytic. But since the Thrasymachus of the *Republic* is a fictional creation (though based on a real-life prototype), there is also an issue about what Plato *wants* him to want. When some thesis threatens one of his core commitments, Plato has a tendency to deploy two not-very-honest tactics in response. Either he gets Socrates' victims to make the thesis more extreme (and therefore easier to refute) or he gets the victim to combine the thesis with several others, thus enabling Socrates to 'refute' the combination, hoping that we won't notice (or perhaps not noticing himself) that this leaves the original thesis untouched. Thus in the *Gorgias*, Callicles' thesis that it is right by nature that

ruthless Machiavellian<sup>12</sup> types ought to rule is combined with an unbridled hedonism that is actually at odds with it (since the career of a Machiavellian prince requires a good deal of self-discipline)<sup>13</sup>. This empowers Socrates to 'refute' the conjunction, giving the distinct impression that he has thereby refuted the first conjunct. As we have seen, the claim that justice is *often* (or even sometimes) to the advantage of the stronger poses a threat to Plato's key thesis that justice necessarily pays. So Plato has Thrasymachus beef it up to the much more extreme and less plausible thesis that justice is *always* to the advantage of the stronger, which is great deal easier for Socrates to refute. Again, the really dangerous thesis that Plato needs to deal with is the claim that it does not pay to be systematically just. Rather than trying to refute this (relatively) modest claim, Plato puts it into the mouth of Thrasymachus and blows it up into the exaggerated thesis that it *does* pay to be systematically *unjust* (so long as you can get away with it) – a claim that it is easier to disprove.

But in fact, Thrasymachus is wrong in supposing that his revised position vindicates the idea that justice is *always* to the advantage of the stronger. For if rulers cease to be rulers '*in the precise sense*' whenever they enact laws which are *not* in their own exploitative interests, then many *actual* rulers are either not rulers 'in the precise sense' or are only rulers 'in the precise sense' some of the time, since they sometimes make such mistakes. This means that being just – obeying the laws of one's society – will not *always* be to the advantage of the stronger a) because some rulers do not qualify as 'strong' since they are not, or are only intermittently, rulers 'in the precise sense' and b) because when they are *not* being rulers in the precise sense, some of the rules that they enact will *not* be in their own exploitative interests.

---

<sup>12</sup> This is, of course, anachronistic but it is clear from Callicles' rather inarticulate attempts to articulate his ideal, that the tough and manly types who he thinks have a natural right to rule, are much closer to Machiavellian princes than to the self-indulgent sots that Socrates persuades him to endorse. See Beversluis (2000) ch. 16.

<sup>13</sup> It is obviously Machiavelli's opinion that being a successful prince – or at least a successful *new* prince – is quite hard work and that success is not to be achieved without a good deal of self-discipline. This is one of the themes of Shakespeare's *Henry IV/Henry V* sequence. In order to pursue his schemes of Machiavellian greatness and foreign conquest, Prince Hal has to renounce riot and the pleasure principle as personified by Falstaff: 'I know thee not, old man: fall to thy prayers / How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!'. However, this public act of renunciation (despite Henry's godly pretensions) is not in the service of any project of piety. As the new King's brother Prince John observes 'I will lay odds that, ere this year expire/ We bear our civil swords and native fire/ As far as France: I beard a bird so sing/ Whose music, to my thinking, pleased the king,' *Henry IV*, 2, 5:5. But you cannot conquer France, or even a part of France, if you give yourself up to the pleasures of the flesh.

## 11. Comments on Thrasymachus' Reply

1) Thrasymachus response gets him into a world of trouble later down the line [*Republic*, 341c–342e]. This is partly because of a tension between (Ti) – that ruling or being a ruler is a trade or profession analogous to other trades or professions – and (Tiii) – that the object of the trade of rulership is to exploit one's subjects for one's own advantage. Generally speaking, trades or profession exist because there is a demand for the goods or services that the professional supplies. But the service of *being exploited* is not one for which there is very much demand. Thus if ruling is indeed a trade or profession, and if its function is to exploit everyone else *except* the ruler, then it is very unlike other trades or professions, there being no non-deluded customers for this particular service. Socrates sees this point (sort of) but makes mess of it, arguing via a series of examples, that trades or professions exist to benefit people *other than their practitioners* and that therefore if professionals benefit themselves by earning a fee, they are practising not medicine or accountancy but the parallel trade of a *moneymaker*. 'Then, it is clear now, Thrasymachus, that no craft or rule provides for its own advantage, but, as we've been saying for some time, it provides and orders for its subject and aims at its advantage, that of the weaker, not of the stronger' (*Republic*, 3467e). But Socrates' position is even more confused than that of Thrasymachus. True, trades and professions exist to supply goods and services to some set of clients *other than the tradesman or professional*. That is why being a hitman or an assassin is a trade or a profession but being a serial killer is not. Hitmen and assassins are there to serve the needs of their customers, such as gangsters, drug-lords and dictatorial politicians. Such people have requirements and these can be well or badly met. (A hitman who usually fails to make the hit or who gets himself caught because of carelessness will be useless or even inimical to his employers.) Amateur murderers serve nobody but themselves. Thus in *one* sense trades and profession exist to benefit somebody other than the tradesman or the professional, which means that, thus far, Socrates is correct. But they are *practiced* for the benefit of the professionals and indeed would not exist unless they provided such benefits. 'It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.' (Adam Smith, (1776/1999) *The Wealth of Nations*, Book 1, ch.2.) Though there has to be an external demand for some goods or services for a trade or profession to exist, if it did not pay somebody to *supply* the relevant goods and services then there would be no corresponding trade or



## What Thrasymachus Should Have Said

profession. Furthermore, people don't cease to be tradesmen or professionals when they pursue their own interests as well as – or even at the expense of – their clients. If the nurses campaign for better wages and conditions they don't thereby cease to be nurses, even if this will result in higher medical fees (in a private healthcare system) or higher taxes (in a public one). Just because professionals qua professionals are necessarily benefiting somebody else, it does not follow that they *are not* or *should not be* benefiting themselves.

However, what is really wrong with Socrates' response is that he confuses the *clients* of tradesmen or professionals with those *over whom they exercise some authority*. Sometimes these classes roughly coincide, as with a doctor and her patients<sup>14</sup>, but often they do not. To use Thrasymachus' example, shepherding as a trade exists to benefit the shepherd's customers, there being a demand for sheepmeat and wool, though it is *practiced* for the benefit of the shepherd himself and/or his landlords or employers. It neither exists nor is practiced for the benefit of the sheep. The point is even clearer if we consider Socrates' example of a ship's captain, who, according Socrates, 'won't seek and order what is advantageous to himself, but what is advantageous to a sailor, his subject'. But of course, a sea-captain may very well seek his own advantage or that of the ship-owners, by screwing down the wages and conditions of the sailors to the lowest level compatible with operational efficiency. He would not be falling down on the job *as a captain* by pursuing such a ruthless policy. It is true that the captain's profession exists to serve people other than himself but the people in question are not the sailors who he 'rules' but the customers for whom he provides a service, namely the passengers who are travelling with him or the merchants whose goods he is conveying from port to port<sup>15</sup>. If he cuts cargo costs or the price of passage by reducing wages and conditions, they are likely to regard him with favour. The point is even more obvious if we consider the trades of a slaver or a slave-ship captain. Here the trades or professions exist to meet some demand on the part of other people (since neither slavers nor slave-ship captains would exist if their customers did not require the services of slaves) but these trades are certainly not exercised for the benefit of their 'subjects', namely the slaves themselves.

---

<sup>14</sup> Though even here the coincidence is not exact. A doctor can tell the receptionists in her practice what to do, but generally speaking, she can only *advise* her patients. 'Doctor's orders' are often disobeyed.

<sup>15</sup> There are, of course, exceptions such as a ship's captain who is either an employee or a member of a sailors' cooperative. It would indeed be part of such a ship's captain job description to benefit the sailors *as well as* the ship's customers. But that is not because she is a *ship's captain* but because she is the *ship's captain of a sailors' collective*.

2) Thrasymachus's claim (Tii) – that professionals temporarily cease to be professionals 'in the precise sense' whenever they make a mistake in their professional capacities – isn't totally crazy. If a doctor or a lawyer is sufficiently incompetent, we are inclined to say such things as: 'Call yourself a doctor? What about all those dead bodies piling up in the morgue? How many patients do you have to lose before you get disbarred?' 'I suppose technically you could call her a lawyer but she's never taken a case that she hasn't managed to lose. She's not really a lawyer in my book.' And presumably they said similar things in Ancient Greece. If the practitioners of some trade or profession are sufficiently incompetent, we – and that's probably a cross-cultural 'we' – are inclined to say that they are not genuine practitioners of the trade or profession in question.

3) Nonetheless, Thrasymachus' (Tii) is still pretty silly. Though we are perhaps inclined to say that a sufficiently incompetent doctor isn't really a doctor, we do not think a doctor ceases to be a doctor *every time she makes a mistake*. And the same thing goes for lawyers, accountants, carpenters and sea captains. We certainly don't think that a ruler ceases to be *a ruler* every time he or she makes a mistake. The following, for instance, would be utterly absurd: 'Jacinda [the New Zealand Prime Minister] was doing great but I think she messed up taking Auckland down to Level Three and reducing the Covid restrictions. In that instant she temporarily ceased to be a Prime Minister.' And there is reason to think that such remark would have seemed equally silly in Ancient Greece. Plutarch's *Demetrius* (in Plutarch (2011)) tells the tale of Demetrius 'the Besieger' (though he would have been more aptly surnamed 'Demetrius the Conspicuous Consumer'), one of the successors of Alexander the Great. He was declared to be a king by his father Antigonus 'the one-eyed' in 306 BCE when the two of them were ruling large chunks of the Middle East. Plutarch (who, it is worth remembering, rather fancied himself as a Platonist) represents Demetrius as an error-prone prince who frequently made mistakes which undermined his prestige and ultimately his power. He seems to have been a sex-addict on a truly epic scale, polluting the Temple of Athena on the Acropolis with his orgies, squandering vast sums of money on famous courtesans, and forcing a handsome free-born boy to commit suicide in order to evade his attentions<sup>16</sup>. He was arrogant, dilatory and dismissive in the conduct of public business and noted for his foppish fondness for fine clothes, on which he lavished a fortune. ('Your taxes at work!') Plutarch is clear that these were mistakes, since they diminished Demetrius's prestige, but he never suggests that

---

<sup>16</sup> The problem was that the boy was freeborn. Nobody supposed that there was an issue about sexually coercing *slaves*.

Demetrius ceased to be a king or a ruler *when he was making them*, but only thereafter when the consequences of his mistakes caught up with him, resulting in his downfall (or rather, his *downfalls*, as Demetrius managed to lose one kingdom only to gain another which he also subsequently lost).

4) To make the argument work, Thrasymachus must assume that the trade or profession of *being a ruler* is the trade or profession of *being an exploitative ruler*. For that to be so, *being exploitative* would have to be internal to the concept of rulership. Otherwise insufficiently exploitative rulers would not be falling down on the job. But though many rulers are, of course, exploitative, it is absurd to suppose that *being exploitative* is part of the job-description<sup>17</sup>.

5) The craft analogy is pretty dubious when applied to individual rulers. Being a ruler is not a profession like being a doctor, an accountant or a sea-captain, because there is no reasonably well-defined client-base for which the ruler *as such* provides goods or services. (However this is not true of certain *kinds* of rulers such as Prime Ministers in a democracy or a parliamentary oligarchy where the Prime Minister is perhaps someone who is supposed to provide a range of leadership services for the benefit of a wider public.) But the craft analogy is utterly silly when applied to ruling *classes*. *Being a ruling class* is not a trade or profession. So even if professionals cease to be professionals in the moment they mess up (which they don't), it is absurd to suppose that a ruling *class* ceases to be a ruling *class* in the moment that its members (or their political representatives) collectively mess up.

## 12. What Thrasymachus Should Have Said

Thus Thrasymachus' response to Socrates is a dreadful mistake. But what should he have said instead? Is a better response available given that he rejects Clitophon's lifeline? I am going to suggest a Darwinian reply that preserves the rational kernel of Thrasymachus' position whilst avoiding its excesses:

---

<sup>17</sup> Though there is an important qualification to make here. There are perhaps some *kinds* of rulers whose professional duty it is to provide leadership services for an exploitative ruling class. A feudal king who weakened baronial power over the peasantry might be regarded by his baronial clients as falling down on the job. Something similar might be said of a bourgeois prime minister in a parliamentary oligarchy who failed to keep the proletariat in check. But in both cases the ruler is supplying leadership services to a client base that he is not (or need not be) exploiting, even if the services include sustaining an exploitative social order. Moreover it is open to kings and prime ministers to reject or revise their job-descriptions and to seek to provide leadership services for an expanded clientele. 'I am not just a king for the lords and the barons but a king for *all* my subjects. . . 'I am the servant of the people not just the propertied classes...'

*Of course*, a ruler, a set of rulers or a ruling class can make mistakes, promulgating laws or fostering customs and ideologies that are not in their interests, that is laws, customs or ideologies that do not function so as to perpetuate their power. Indeed they may sometimes promulgate laws or foster customs or ideologies that are inimical to their continued rule. But a ruler, a set of rulers or a ruling class which does this too often will soon cease to be the ruler, the ruling group or the ruling class. They will be winnowed out by a process of quasi-Darwinian selection. So *on the whole* the laws, customs or ideologies prevalent in a society will tend to promote the interests of the ruler, the ruling group or the ruling class – especially if the ruler, the ruling group or the ruling class has been in power for some time. So justice (acting justly) will *usually* be to the ‘advantage of the stronger’ since when it is not there is a tendency for the stronger to cease to be strong. To paraphrase Marx and Engels “The ruling ideas of each age have [usually] been the ideas of its ruling class, since when they have been otherwise the ruling class has often ceased to rule.”

In this connection Guthrie quotes a time-worn couplet

Treason doth never prosper: what’s the reason?  
For if it prosper none dare call it treason.<sup>18</sup>

We may express my revised Thrasymachean idea as follows:

Justice serves the interests of the stronger:  
If it does not, then they are strong no longer.

This response has an obvious advantage over Clitophon’s lifeline – it does not entail that laws and customs are *consciously* enacted to perpetuate the powers and privileges of the ruler or the ruling class (though it does not entail that they *not* enacted consciously either). This is a big plus since (as noted by Marx and Russell) ideological self-deception is common amongst both rulers and ruling classes. Furthermore the thesis not only predicts but *explains* why it is that the laws and customs of a stable society tend to favour ‘the strong’. If they did not, the stronger would probably cease to be ‘strong’.

---

<sup>18</sup> Guthrie (1971) p. 297. Apparently, this is due to Sir John Harrington, Elizabeth I’s godson and the inventor of the water-closet.

### 13. Thrasymachus' Argument Revised

Suppose we make this change. How does this affect Thrasymachus' overall Argument?

(T1\*) *Nominalism*: There is nothing more to justice than what is commonly accepted as such.

(T2\*) *Relativistic Definition*: To be just is to have settled disposition to give each one his or her due **according to the laws and customs of one's society**.

(T3\*\*) *Sociological Thesis*: The laws and customs of a society (especially a stable society) *tend* to subserve the interests of the stronger – the ruler, the rulers or the ruling class – since if they did not, the stronger would cease to be strong. This is often at the expense of the 'weak'.

(T4\*\*) Being just involves following laws and customs that *tend* to subserve the interests of the stronger, often at the expense of the 'weak'.

(T5b\*) Being just is **nothing but** subserving the interests of the stronger ....

But wait! Here we hit a problem that we flagged earlier. (T5b\*) does not follow from the original (T4\*) ('Being just involves following laws and customs that subserve the interests of the stronger') and it certainly does not follow from (T4\*\*). There are three reasons for this. (I) As noted above, even if being just involves following laws that *always* subserve the interests of the stronger, this does not imply that following those laws does not *also* serve the interests of the 'weak' (that is the subjects). (II) Being just may serve somebody's interests if he himself is one of the 'strong'. (III) If being just involves following laws and customs that *tend* to subserve the interests of the stronger, then even if we accept the absurd suggestion that an act which serves one person's interests cannot be in the best interest of another, it may pay a subject to be just on those occasions when the laws or customs in question are not in the ruler's best interests. Therefore Thrasymachus – even the revised, more sociologically sophisticated Thrasymachus – has failed to prove that 'justice is really the good of another, the advantage of the stronger and the ruler, and harmful to the one who obeys and serves'.

But surely Thrasymachus is onto something. Aren't there plenty of social systems in which a minority systematically exploits everyone else? In such societies, systematically following the rules will often be 'harmful to the one who obeys and serves' even if there are *some* laws that it pays all or most

people to obey. This suggests the following reconstruction of Thrasymachus' argument:

(T1\*) *Nominalism*: There is nothing more to justice than what is commonly accepted as such.

(T2\*) *Relativistic Definition*: To be just is to have settled disposition to give each one his or her due ***according to the laws and customs of one's society***.

(T3\*\*) *Sociological Thesis*: The laws and customs of a society (especially a stable society) *tend* to subserve the interests of the stronger – the ruler, the rulers or the ruling class – since if they did not the stronger would cease to be strong. This is often at the expense of the weak.

(T4\*\*) Being just involves following laws and customs that *tend* to subserve the interests of the stronger, often at the expense of the 'weak'. Indeed, being just can involve being complicit in one's own exploitation or oppression.

(T5c\*) Often being just – that is, being systematically just – does not pay the just person especially if that person is not one of the 'strong'.

(T6\*) To be unjust is simply not to be just.

(T7\*\*) It often pays to be unjust that is, *not* to be systematically committed to obeying a set of laws and customs that (in a different sense) systematically conspire to do you down.

Does the new Thrasymachean conclusion (T7\*\*) – that it *often* pays to be unjust, that is, *not* to be systematically committed to obeying a set of laws and customs that (in a different sense) systematically conspire to exploit and oppress you – disprove what Plato wants to prove, namely (P3) that *it necessarily pays to be just*? Yes so long as

a) we adopt a relativistic conception of justice [Premises (T1\*) and (T2\*)]

and

b) we adopt a common-sense conception of self-interest or what pays, according to which it does not pay to be dominated or exploited.

Which perhaps is why Plato spends most of the *Republic* developing an absolute conception of justice and a weirdly counterintuitive conception of both happiness and what pays.

But Plato's absolute conception of justice isn't going to get him off the hook – not by itself, at any rate.

#### 14. Objective Relativism:

##### **Justice in the Statesman and Disobedience in the Apology**

Unlike Thrasymachus Plato has an absolute conception of justice according to which there is more to justice than what is commonly accepted as such. For Thrasymachus the laws and customs of a given society cannot be condemned as unjust, since justice in that society is *defined* by the prevailing laws and customs. What is due to each person is what is *conventionally* due to each person, and absent such conventions, nothing is due to anybody. Not so, for Plato. For Plato what is *conventionally* due to a person may not be what is *really* due to that person. (See *Laws* 714–715). The obedience that is conventionally due to a tyrant will not be what that tyrant *really* deserves and the tyrant is therefore wrong to demand it. Thus Plato is in a position to condemn tyrannical regimes as unjust. And by the same token, he is in a position to condemn *democratic* regimes as unjust. What is *conventionally* due to an Athenians citizen (however banalistic he may be) is a voice in the affairs of the city and the right *not* to be ordered about by aristocrats or self-important philosophers. What is *really* due to him however, is a regard for his fundamental interests on the part of a dictatorial but philosophically trained elite. Absent a philosophical training, he does not know what is really good for him, and since he does not know what is really good for him, he does not really have a right to run his own life as he sees fit. Thus what is *conventionally* due to him is not what is *really* due to him and the society which awards him a set of rights of which he cannot make good use is fundamentally unjust. And this is generally true of societies which grant people by convention rights and privileges which are not theirs by nature, be they Calliclean tyrants or uppity cobblers. So Plato, unlike his creation Thrasymachus, has the intellectual wherewithal to condemn the laws and customs of a society as objectively unjust. But this leaves him with a problem. In so far as they depart from Plato's prescriptions *most* societies, actual and possible, are unjust. Convention grants to some what is *not* really their due and denies to others what *is* really their due (for example, women with the potential to philosophise, who deserve the opportunity to become Philosopher Queens). And this is because *actual* conventions were devised (or have evolved at the hands of) people who don't have the necessary philosophical expertise.

So what to do? Does the just person try to give each person what is *really* their due or what is *conventionally* their due (whilst perhaps writing

philosophical block-busters, arguing that surely there has been some mistake)? Sensibly perhaps, Plato opts for the second alternative. (Trying to deprive the citizen cobbler of his conventional rights whilst subordinating him to the rule of a philosophical elite does not sound like a practical policy. Nor does sounding out one's female acquaintances for their philosophical potential and encouraging them to go in for athletics with a view to becoming Philosopher Queens. And it would surely have been a big mistake not to give Dionysius of Syracuse that degree of obedience that was due to him by convention even though it was not due to him by nature. As the *Seventh Letter* makes plain, Plato's rather feeble attempts to implement his political ideas were conspicuous and nearly fatal failures.) Here is the Visitor (otherwise known as the Eleatic Stranger) in the *Statesman*:

No one in the city should dare to do anything contrary to the laws, and ... the person who dares to do so should be punished by death and all the worst punishments (*Statesman*, 297d) [The visitor is explicitly discussing laws which are *not* devised by a genuine expert and which are therefore not genuinely just.]

For these reasons, then, the second-best method of proceeding [again when the laws are *not* devised by a genuine expert], for those who establish laws and written rules about anything whatever, is to allow neither individual nor mass ever to do anything contrary to these—anything whatsoever. (*Statesman*, 300 b–c.)

The requirement, then, as it seems, for all constitutions of this sort, if they are going to produce a good imitation of that true constitution of one man ruling with expertise, so far as they can, is that—given that they have their laws—they must never do anything contrary to what is written or to ancestral customs. (*Statesman*, 300 d–301.)

Thus Plato seems to be committed to something very close to Premise (T2\*) in my analytic reconstruction of Thrasymachus's argument. Instead of

(T2\*) *Relativistic Definition*: To be just is to have settled disposition to give each one his or her due **according to the laws and customs of one's society**.

we have



## What Thrasymachus Should Have Said

(T2P\*) *Objectively Relativistic Principle*: To be *genuinely* just is to have settled disposition to give each one his or her due **according to the laws and customs of one's society**.

The difference between (T2\*) and (T2P\*) is that Thrasymachus is only *defining* justice without recommending it (indeed he thinks it a wise policy to be unjust if you can get away with it) whereas Plato is insisting on obedience to the laws and customs one's society as some sort of moral imperative<sup>19</sup>.

Are there any exceptions to this principle? Perhaps. In the *Apology*, Socrates boasts (presumably with Plato's authorial approval) that he did not go along with the regime of the Thirty (a short-lived terrorist regime imposed upon Athens in the wake of military defeat by Sparta)<sup>20</sup> when they ordered him to participate in the extra-judicial execution of Leon of Salamis. Instead he simply 'went home', an act of civil disobedience for which he might have been put to death 'had not the government fallen shortly afterwards' (*Apology* 32d). Thus Plato may have supposed that there could be positive laws so heinous that the just man should not obey them. But it is not clear that Socrates' civil disobedience, in the *Apology* constitutes an exception to Plato's conformist principle in the *Statesman*. Though supposedly mandated to reform the constitution, the Thirty do not seem to have made much progress with this project since they were too busy massacring their political opponents. Thus Socrates could claim that by disobeying Critias's terroristic regime, he was not 'doing anything contrary to what [was] written or to ancestral customs' since the Thirty had not gotten around to rewriting the laws and were clearly in violation of ancestral customs.

However that may be, we are now in a position to reconstruct Thrasymachus's argument without endorsing *either* his nominalism *or* his sociological relativism. We eliminate (T1\*) and (T2\*) replacing them both with (T2P\*). This gives us:

---

<sup>19</sup> I am highly indebted here to David Keyt (2009) 'Plato on Justice'. See in particular pp 354–5 where he notes a potential problem for Plato. 'Will the Platonically just person obey faulty laws, particularly when his obedience will cause someone else to be treated unjustly? For example, will a Platonically just person, acting in an official capacity, enforce an unjust law or enforce an unjust application of a just law? Consider Socrates' jailer. Socrates' sentence, we may agree, is unjust. Would a Platonically just jailer administer the hemlock? This problem of the just executioner is a serious one for Plato because he appears to subscribe to three principles that are potentially conflicting: (1) that some laws are unjust; (2) that law should be strictly obeyed; and (3) that one should never do anything that is unjust.'

<sup>20</sup> For the relevant history see Hale (2009), Waterfield (2009), Stone (1988), Xenophon (1979) *A History of My Times*, and Lysias (1970) 'Against Eratosthenes'.

(T2P\*) *Objectively Relativistic Principle*: To be *genuinely* just is to have settled disposition to give each one his or her due **according to the laws and customs of one's society** (though perhaps with very rare exceptions).

(T3\*\*) *Sociological Thesis*: The laws and customs of a society (especially a stable society) *tend* to subserve the interests of the stronger – the ruler, the rulers or the ruling class – since if they did not the stronger would cease to be strong. This is often at the expense of the weak.

(T4\*\*) Being just involves following laws and customs that *tend* to subserve the interests of the stronger, often at the expense of the 'weak'. Indeed, being just can involve being complicit in one's own exploitation or oppression.

(T5c\*) Often being just – that is, being systematically just – does not pay the just person, especially if that person is not one of the elite.

(T6\*) To be unjust is simply not to be just.

(T7\*\*) It often pays to be unjust that is, *not* to be systematically committed to obeying a set of laws and customs that (in a different sense) systematically conspire to do you down.

Can Plato evade this conclusion, given that it is derived from a premise that he seems to endorse plus a set of historical and sociological platitudes? Only by insisting

a) that it is impossible for somebody to be *behaviorally* just – that is, to have settled disposition to give each one their due according to the laws and customs of their society – without possessing *psychic* justice – that is, without having a soul organised along the lines of Plato's totalitarian city;

b) that it is impossible to possess psychic justice without being behaviorally just;

and

c) that the benefits of psychic justice far outweigh the costs of actively conniving at your own exploitation and oppression.

Platonic scholars may be professionally obliged to take these ideas seriously, but they don't deserve the compliment of a rational refutation.

## 15. Coda

‘And what about you Professor Pigden? What’s *your* conception of justice and do *you* think it pays to be just?’ Like Plato I can make room for the idea that the laws of one’s society are unjust (at least in my book) but, unlike Plato, I think that when they are, justice consists partly in defying, evading or trying to amend them. Is *that* kind of justice the royal road to happiness? Ask those brave democrats rotting in Hong Kong jails. Ask the many martyrs to democracy for whom I used to write letters as member of Amnesty International. If my kind of justice is to be defended, this won’t be because it can be relied upon to pay.

## Bibliography

- Aquinas, St T. (1947) *Summa Theologica*, trans Dominican Fathers, Benziger Brothers, pdf version Christian Classics Ethereal Library, [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).
- Aquinas, St T. (1953) *The Political Ideas of St Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Bigongiari, New York, Hefner.
- Aristotle (2014) *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, One-Volume Digital Edition, Barnes Jonathan ed., Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J.
- Aristotle (2000) *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Crisp, R, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Aristotle (1996) *The Politics and the Constitution of Athens*, Everson, Stephen ed. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Barney, Rachel, (2017) “Callicles and Thrasymachus”, in Zalta ed. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Zalta, ed., URL <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/callicles-thrasymachus/>>.
- Barney, Rachel (2006) ‘Socrates’ Refutation of Thrasymachus’ in Santas, ed. *The Blackwell Guide to Plato’s Republic*.
- Benson, Hugh H ed. (2009) *A Companion to Plato*, Oxford, Blackwell.
- Beverluis, John (2000) *Cross-Examining Socrates*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Demos, Raphael (1964) ‘A Fallacy in Plato’s *Republic*?’ *Philosophical Review*, 73, 395–8.
- Guthrie, W.K.C. (1971) *The Sophists* (= *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Volume 3, Part 1, 1969), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hale, John, R (2009) *Lords of the Sea: The Epic Story of the Athenian navy and the Birth of Democracy*, London, Penguin.

- Keyt, David (2009) 'Plato on Justice' in Benson, ed. *A Companion to Plato*.
- Lysias (1970) 'Against Eratosthenes'; in Saunders ed *Greek Political Oratory*.
- Machiavelli, Niccolo (2005) *The Prince*, trans and ed Bondanella, Peter, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick (1844–6) [date of composition] *The German Ideology*, in Marx and Engels (1969) *Selected Works*, volume 1.
- Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick (1848) '*The Communist Manifesto*', in Marx and Engels (1969) *Selected Works*, volume 1.
- Marx, Karl (1852) *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in Marx and Engels (1969) *Selected Works*, volume 1.
- Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick (1969) *Selected Works*, 3 vols., Moscow, Progress Publishers.
- Pigden, Charles R. (1988), 'Anscombe on "Ought"' *Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 20–41.
- Plato (1997) *Plato: Complete Works*. Cooper, John M ed. Indianapolis, Hackett.
- Plato, *Apology*, translated by G.M.A. Grube in Cooper ed. *Plato: Complete Works*.
- Plato, *Protagoras*, translated by Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell in Cooper ed. *Plato: Complete Works*.
- Plato, *Gorgias*, translated by Donald J. Zeyl, in Cooper ed. *Plato: Complete Works*.
- Plato, *Republic*, translated by G.M.A. Grube, revised by C.D.C. Reeve, in Cooper ed. *Plato: Complete Works*.
- Plato, *Statesman*, translated by C. J. Rowe in Cooper ed. *Plato: Complete Works*.
- Plato, *Laws*, translated by Trevor J. Saunders in Cooper ed. *Plato: Complete Works*.
- Plato, *Letters*, translated by Glenn R. Morrow in Cooper ed. *Plato: Complete Works*.
- Plato [the attribution is dubious], *Clitophon*, translated by Francisco J. Gonzalez, in Cooper ed. *Plato: Complete Works*.
- Nussbaum, Martha Craven, (1986) *The Fragility of Goodness*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

What Thrasymachus Should Have Said

- Pappas, Niklas (2003) *Routledge Guidebook to Plato and the Republic*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, London and New York, Routledge.
- Plutarch (2011) *The Age of Alexander*, trans Scott-Kilvert, London, Penguin.
- Vlastos (1973) 'Justice and Happiness in the *Republic*' in Vlastos (1981) *Platonic Studies*.
- Vlastos, G. (1981) *Platonic Studies*, 2nd edn. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Sachs, David (1963) 'A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic*' *Philosophical Review*, 72, 141–58.
- Santas, Gerasimos ed. (2006) *The Blackwell Guide to Plato's Republic*, Oxford, Blackwell.
- Saunders, A.N.W. ed and trans. (1970) *Greek Political Oratory*, Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Seneca (1969) *Letters from a Stoic: Epistulae Morales ad Ludlium*, Campbell, R trans, Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Shakespeare, William (1994) *Four Histories*, Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Shakespeare, William (2015) *Titus Andronicus*, London, Penguin.
- Stone, I.F. (1988) *The Trial of Socrates*, London, Picador.
- Russell, B. (1938) *Freedom and Organization*, London, Allen and Unwin.
- Russell (1944) 'Reply to Criticisms' Schilpp, P.A. ed. *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, Northwestern University, Evanston and Chicago.
- Smith, Adam (1776, 1997) *The Wealth of Nations*, 2 vols. Skinner, A ed., Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Thucydides (1993) Thucydides On Justice Power and Human Nature, Woodruff, Paul, trans. and ed. Indianapolis, Hackett.
- Waterfield, Robin (2009) *Why Socrates Died: Dispelling the Myths*, London, Faber and Faber.
- Woodruff (1993) 'Introduction' in Woodruff ed. Thucydides On Justice Power and Human Nature.
- Xenophon (1979) *A History of My Times*, trans Warner, Rex, Harmondsworth, Penguin.

Charles Pigden  
University of Otago, New Zealand  
charles.pigden@otago.ac.nz