

SELECTIONS FROM PLATO'S

GORGIAS

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THE "POWER" OF TYRANTS AND ORATORS

POLUS: Do you think that good orators are thought of as flatterers in their cities and, therefore, as worthless?¹ 466b

SOCRATES: Is that a question you are asking, or are you beginning a speech?

POLUS: I'm asking a question.

SOCRATES: I don't think that they're thought of at all.

POLUS: What? Don't they have great power in their cities?

SOCRATES: Not if by "power" you mean something that's good for the person who has it.

POLUS: Of course that's what I mean.

SOCRATES: Then, I think that the orators have the least power of anyone in their city.

POLUS: What? Aren't they like tyrants who can put anyone they please to death, and deprive anyone of his property and banish him from their cities as they see fit? c

SOCRATES: By the dog, Polus, I'm afraid that I'm still confused by everything you say. Is this a statement on your part and a declaration of your own opinion, or is it a question you're asking me?

POLUS: I'm asking you.

¹ Polus (whose name, incidentally, means colt) was a student of Gorgias' and the author of at least one treatise on rhetoric. The *Gorgias* is largely about what rhetoric is and what it is good for. It includes exchanges between Socrates and several sophists or orators, including (of course) Gorgias himself. In the portion preceding this excerpt, Socrates describes rhetoric as a form of flattery and Polus praises it because he thinks it gives one the power to make others do whatever one wants.

SOCRATES: Alright, my friend, but then you're asking me two things at once.

POLUS: Two?

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SOCRATES: Weren't you just saying something like this: "Isn't it the case that the orators put to death anyone they want, like the tyrants, and deprive people of property and banish them from their cities as they may see fit?"

POLUS: I was.

SOCRATES: Then I'm telling you that there are two questions here, and I will give you answers to them both. Polus, I say that the orators and the tyrants alike have the least power in their cities, as I stated just now; since they do nothing that they want to do, practically speaking, though they do whatever they think is best.

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POLUS: Well, and is not that a great power to have?

SOCRATES: No, at least not judging by what Polus says.

POLUS: I say no!?! Pardon me, I say yes.

SOCRATES: No, by the...? No, you don't. For you said that great power is something that's good for the person who has it.

POLUS: Yes, and I stand by it.

SOCRATES: Then do you regard it as a good thing when a man without understanding does what he thinks to be best? Is that what you call having "a great power"?

POLUS: No.

SOCRATES: Then will you prove that the orators have understanding, and that rhetoric is an art, not a sort of flattery, and so refute me? Otherwise, if you are going to leave me unrefuted, the orators and tyrants who do what they see fit in their cities will find that there's no good in doing that—if power is, indeed, as you say, good, and doing what one sees fit without understanding is, as you yourself admit (don't you?) bad.

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POLUS: Yes, I do.

SOCRATES: How then can the orators or the tyrants have great power in their cities, unless Socrates is refuted by Polus, and admits that they do what they want?

POLUS: This man here...

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SOCRATES: ...denies that they do what they want. There, refute me.

POLUS: Didn't you admit just now that they do what they think best?

SOCRATES: Yes, and I admit it now.

POLUS: Then don't they do what they want?

SOCRATES: I say no.

POLUS: When they do what they see fit?

SOCRATES: Yes.

POLUS: What shocking—no, monstrous answers, Socrates!

SOCRATES: Spare your invective, peerless Polus—if I may address you in your own style. If you have a question to ask me, expose my error; otherwise, answer yourself. c

POLUS: Well, I am ready to answer, so that I can find out what you mean.

SOCRATES: Then is it your view that, when people do something, what they want is the very thing they're doing at the time? Or do they want the thing for the sake of which they're doing it? For instance, when people take medicines prescribed by their doctors, is what they want the very thing they're doing—taking the medicine and suffering the pain of it? Or is what they want to be healthy—the thing for the sake of which they take the medicine?

POLUS: To be healthy, without a doubt. d

SOCRATES: And it's the same with seafarers, and in general with such people who pursue profit in trade: what they want is not what they are doing at each moment—for who wants to go on a voyage, and incur all its danger and trouble? What they want is to be wealthy. That, I suppose, is the thing for the sake of which they make their voyages. Isn't for the sake of wealth that they make them?

POLUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And isn't it just the same in every case? If a man does one thing for the sake of another, he does not want the thing that he does; rather he wants the thing for the sake of which he does it.

POLUS: Yes. e

SOCRATES: Now is there anything that is not either good or bad or between these—neither good nor bad?

POLUS: Definitely not, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Well, do you call wisdom and health and wealth and everything else of that kind good, and their opposites bad?

POLUS: I do.

SOCRATES: And by things that are neither good nor bad do you mean things that are such as to sometimes partake of the good and sometimes of the bad and sometimes of neither—for example, sitting, walking, running, and sailing, or again, stones and sticks and anything else like that? These are what you mean, aren't they? Or are there other things that you describe as neither good nor bad? 468

POLUS: No, these are the things I mean.

SOCRATES: Then, when people do these intermediate things, do they do them for the sake of the good things, or do they do the good things for the sake of the intermediate ones?

POLUS: They do the intermediate, I suppose, for the sake of the good.

SOCRATES: So it's in pursuit of the good that we walk, when we walk, supposing it to be better. And when we stand still, by contrast, we stand still for the sake of the same thing, the good. Isn't this so? b

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And so we put a man to death, if we do put him to death (or banish him or deprive him of his property), because we think it better for us to do this than not?

POLUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: So it is for the sake of the good that the doers of all these things do them?

POLUS: I agree.

SOCRATES: And we have admitted that when we do things for the sake of something, we do not want those things, but the thing for the sake of which we do them?

POLUS: Quite so. c

SOCRATES: Then we do not want to slaughter people or banish them from our cities or deprive them of their property as an act in itself. Rather we want to do these things if they are beneficial, but if they're harmful, we do not want them. For we want what is good, as you say; but we do not want something that's neither good nor bad, nor do we want

something that's bad, do we? Is what I say true in your opinion, Polus, or not? Why don't you answer?

POLUS: It's true.

SOCRATES: Since we agree about that then, if a man puts anyone to death or banishes him from a city or deprives him of his property (whether he does it as a tyrant or an orator), because he thinks it's better for himself though it is really worse, then that man, I take it, does what he sees fit, doesn't he? d

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now is it also what he wants, supposing it to be really bad? Why do you not answer?

POLUS: No, I do not think he does what he wants.

SOCRATES: Can such a man then be said to have great power in that city, if to have great power is something good, according to your admission? e

POLUS: He cannot.

SOCRATES: Then I spoke the truth when I said that it is possible for a man to do what he sees fit in a city and yet neither to have great power nor to do what he wants.

ARE UNJUST PEOPLE HAPPY OR MISERABLE?

POLUS: As if you, Socrates, wouldn't accept the liberty of doing what you see fit in your city rather than not, and wouldn't envy a man if you say that he had the power to put someone to death as he saw fit, or to have him deprived of his property or sent him to prison!

SOCRATES: Do you mean justly or unjustly?

POLUS: Whichever way he does it, isn't it enviable in either case? 469

SOCRATES: Hush, Polus!

POLUS: Why?

SOCRATES: Because we should not envy either the unenviable or the miserable; we should pity them.

POLUS: What! Is that what you think about the people I'm talking about?

SOCRATES: Of course.

POLUS: Then do you think that a man who puts another to death as he sees fit, and justly puts him to death, is miserable and pitiable?

SOCRATES: No, but I don't think he's enviable either.

POLUS: Didn't you just say that he was miserable?

SOCRATES: I only said that about someone who unjustly puts someone to death, my friend, and I called him pitiable as well. If he acted justly, then he is unenviable. b

POLUS: I suppose, at any rate, the man who is put to death unjustly is both pitiable and miserable.

SOCRATES: Less so than the one who puts him to death, Polus, and less so than someone who is put to death justly.

POLUS: How can that be, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Because doing something unjust is the worst thing there is.

POLUS: What? Is this the worst? Isn't it worse to suffer injustice?

SOCRATES: By no means.

POLUS: Then would you want rather to suffer injustice than to do it?

SOCRATES: I wouldn't want either, for my own part; but if it were necessary either to do an injustice or to suffer it, I would choose to suffer it rather than do it. c

POLUS: Then you wouldn't accept a tyrant's power?

SOCRATES: Not if you mean the same thing as I do by "a tyrant's power".

POLUS: Why, what I mean is, as I did just now, the liberty of doing anything one sees fit in one's city—putting people to death and banishing them and doing everything at one's own discretion.

SOCRATES: My gifted friend, let me speak, and then you can take me to task when it's your turn. Suppose that I was in a crowded market and I hid a dagger under my arm and then said to you: "Polus, I have just acquired, by a wonderful chance, the power of a tyrant; for if I see fit that one of the people you see there should die this very instant, he'll d

be a dead man, just as I see fit; or if I see fit that one of them should have his head broken, it will be broken immediately; or if I see fit to have his cloak torn into pieces, it will be torn. That's how great my power is in this city!" Then suppose that when you doubted this I showed you my dagger. When you saw it, I expect that you'd say: "Socrates, everyone could have great power in that way. Any house you see fit could be burnt down by these methods, and so could the Athenian arsenals, and the triremes and all the rest of the shipping, both public and private."² But surely this is not what it is to have great power—merely doing what one sees fit. Or do you think it is? e

POLUS: Oh no, not in that way.

SOCRATES: Then can you tell me why you disapprove of this kind of power? 470

POLUS: I can.

SOCRATES: Why, then? Tell me.

POLUS: Because it is inevitable that he who acts like that will be punished.

SOCRATES: And isn't it a bad thing to be punished?

POLUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: So, my remarkable friend, you have come around again to the view that if doing what one sees fit accompanies doing what's beneficial, then it's not merely a good thing but, at the same time, it seems to be the possession of great power; otherwise, it's a bad thing and isn't much power. And, besides, let's consider another point: don't we admit that sometimes it's better to do the things that we were just mentioning (putting people to death and banishing them and depriving them of property), while sometimes it's not? b

POLUS: Sure.

SOCRATES: Then here's a point that it seems is admitted both on your side and mine.

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then when do you say it is better to do these things? Tell me where you draw the line.

POLUS: No, Socrates, I would rather that you answered that.

SOCRATES: Well then I say, Polus, if you prefer to hear it from me, that it is better when c

² A trireme is an ancient warship with three tiers of oarsmen.

these things are done justly, and worse when unjustly.

POLUS: It's so hard to refute you, Socrates! No, a mere child could do it, and prove that what you're saying is untrue!

SOCRATES: Then I'd be very grateful to the child, and equally to you, if you refute me and rid me of my foolishness. Come on, don't get tired of doing favors for your friend; refute me.

POLUS: Well, Socrates, there's certainly no need use ancient instances to refute you. What happened just a day or two ago is enough to refute you, and to prove that many people who behave unjustly are happy. d

SOCRATES: What sort of thing do you mean?

POLUS: I suppose you see that Archelaus, son of Perdiccas, is ruler of Macedonia?³

SOCRATES: Well, if I don't see it, I certainly hear it.⁴

POLUS: Do you consider him happy or miserable?

SOCRATES: I don't know, Polus; I've never met the man.

POLUS: What? You could find out by meeting him, but otherwise can't tell straight off that he's happy? e

SOCRATES: No, by Zeus, I certainly can't.

POLUS: Then doubtless you'll say, Socrates, that you do not know that even the Great King is happy.⁵

SOCRATES: Yes, and I'll be speaking the truth; since I don't know how he stands in regard to education and justice.

POLUS: Why, does all of happiness lie in that?

SOCRATES: Yes, by my account, Polus; for a good and honorable man or woman, I say, is happy, and an unjust and vicious one is miserable.

POLUS: Then this Archelaus, on your statement, is miserable? 471

³ Archelaus usurped the throne of Macedonia in 413 B.C.

⁴ Socrates was reportedly one of several well-known Athenians invited to be guests at his court. He declined. This may be the point of this remark.

⁵ The Great King is the king of Persia.

SOCRATES: Yes, my friend, assuming that he's unjust.

POLUS: Well, but how can he be anything other than unjust? He had no claim to the throne which he now occupies, since he's the son of a woman who was a slave of Perdiccas' brother Alcetas, and in mere justice he was Alcetas' slave. If he wanted to do what's just, he would be serving Alcetas and would be happy, by your account. But, as it is, he's become a spectacle of misery, since he has done the greatest injustice. First of all, he invited this very master and uncle of his to his court, as if he were going to restore the kingdom to him that Perdiccas had deprived him of. And, after entertaining him and his son Alexander (his own cousin, who's about the same age as himself) and getting them drunk, he packed them into a carriage, drove them away at night, and murdered and made away with both of them. And after all these iniquities he failed to observe that he had become a very miserable person and he felt no remorse. Later he refused to make himself happy, by doing what justice required—raising his brother, the legitimate son of Perdiccas, a boy about seven years old who had a just title to the throne, and restoring the kingdom to him. Instead, he threw him into a well and drowned him, and then told his mother Cleopatra that he had fallen in and lost his life while chasing a goose. So now, you see, as the greatest criminal in Macedonia, he is the most miserable of all the Macedonians, rather than the happiest; and I'll bet we could find some Athenians who would join you in preferring to change places with any other Macedonian at all rather than with Archelaus!⁶

SOCRATES: At the beginning of our discussion, Polus, I complimented you on having had what I think was a good training in rhetoric, but you've neglected the art of conversation. And now this is the account with which you think any child could refute me? You think that, since I say that a criminal isn't happy, I stand refuted by this account? What makes you think that, my friend? In fact, I disagree with everything you've said.

POLUS: You're just unwilling to admit it. You really agree with what I've said.

SOCRATES: My gifted friend, you're trying to refute me in rhetorical fashion, as they understand refuting in the law courts. There, someone who has produced many witnesses for whatever account he gives is supposed to have refuted someone who has produced only one witness or none. But this sort of refutation is totally worthless for getting at the truth, since occasionally a man gets crushed by the number and reputation of the false witnesses brought against him.

Now you will find almost everybody, Athenians and foreigners, in agreement with you on the points you make. If you want to produce witnesses against the truth of what I say, there's Nicias, son of Niceratus with his brothers (whose tripods are standing in a row in the Dionysium), and there's Aristocrates, son of Scellias (whose goodly offering again is well known at Delphi); or, if you choose, there is the whole house of Pericles, or pick any other local family. I, alone, standing here before you, do not agree. You haven't

⁶ The word translated "criminal" is derived from the word "injustice" and literally means "doer of injustice."

convinced me. You just attempted, by producing a number of false witnesses against me, to banish me from my property, the truth. But, for my part, if I fail to produce you yourself, as the one witness to confirm what I say, I don't consider myself to have accomplished anything worth much with respect to the things we've been discussing. And I don't consider you to have accomplished anything either, unless I alone act as your one witness, and you leave aside all these others. c

Well now, this is one mode of refutation, as you and many other people understand it; but there is also the other which I on my side understand. Let's therefore compare them with each other and consider whether there is a difference between them. For indeed the things we disagree about are not insignificant. Rather, one might say that they are the things about which it is most honorable to have knowledge, and most disgraceful to lack it, for the heart of it is knowing or not knowing who is happy and who is not.

IS A CRIMINAL BETTER OFF IF HE IS PUNISHED?

To start at once with the point we are now debating, you consider it possible for a man to be happy while being a criminal—that is, being unjust—since you regard Archelaus as both unjust and happy. Are we to understand that this is your view? d

POLUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And I say it is impossible. There we have one point at issue. Very good but then, will a criminal be happy if he gets the punished appropriately?

POLUS: Not at all, then he'd be very miserable.

SOCRATES: But if the criminal escapes punishment, by your account he'll be happy? e

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Whereas in my opinion, Polus, the criminal, the unjust man, miserable in any event, but he's more miserable if he doesn't pay the penalty and gets no punishment for his injustice, but less miserable if he pays the penalty and meets with requital from gods and men.

POLUS: What a strange doctrine, Socrates, you are trying to maintain! 473

SOCRATES: Yes, my friend, and I will try to make you maintain it with me; for I count you as a friend. Well now, these are the points on which we differ; just examine them yourself. I think I told you at an earlier stage that committing injustice was worse than suffering it.

POLUS: Certainly you did.

SOCRATES: And you thought that suffering injustice was worse.

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And I said that criminals were miserable, and I was refuted by you.

POLUS: By Zeus you were.

SOCRATES: So you think, Polus.

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POLUS: And I think truly.

SOCRATES: Perhaps. But you said, on the other hand, that criminals are happy, if they pay no penalty.

POLUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Whereas I say they're the most miserable, and that those who pay the penalty are less so. Do you want to refute that as well?

POLUS: Why, Socrates, that's even harder to refute than your other claim!

SOCRATES: Not merely hard, Polus, but impossible; for the truth can never be refuted.

POLUS: How do you mean? If a man is caught criminally plotting to make himself a tyrant, and he's put on the rack right away and castrated and has his eyes burnt out, and then after having all sorts of other abuses and torments inflicted on him, and seeing them inflicted on his wife and children, he is finally impaled or tarred, will he be happier than he'd be if he escaped and make himself tyrant, and lived his life as the ruler of his city, doing whatever he likes, envied and congratulated by the citizens and by the foreigners as well? You're telling me that it's impossible to refute that?!

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SOCRATES: This time, you're trying to make my skin crawl instead of refuting me, my spirited Polus. A moment ago you were for calling witnesses. However, please refresh my memory a little. You said "unjustly plotting to make himself a tyrant"?

POLUS: I did.

SOCRATES: Then neither of them will ever be happier than the other—neither the one who has unjustly seized tyrannical power, not the one who pays the penalty; for when who people are miserable, neither of them can be happier than the other, but the one who goes free and establishes himself as a tyrant is even more miserable. What's this, Polus? Are you laughing? Here we have yet another form of refutation—when a statement is

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made, you laugh it down, instead of disproving it!

POLUS: Don't you think you've already been refuted, Socrates, when you're saying such things that no one in the world would assent to? Just ask anyone here!

SOCRATES: Polus, I am not a statesmen: indeed, last year, when I was elected a member of the Council, and my tribe presided I had to put a question to the vote, I got laughed at for not understanding the procedure.⁷ So please don't tell me to call a vote of the people present here. If you don't have a better refutation than this, do what I said just now: let me have my turn, and try the sort of refutation that I think is needed. I do know how to produce one witness in support of my statements, and that is the very man with whom I'm having a conversation, but I dismiss the majority. And I know how to call for a vote from one man, but I can't have a conversation with the majority. So see if you're willing to give me a refutation by answering the questions you're asked. 474

WHICH IS WORSE, COMMITTING INJUSTICE OR SUFFERING IT?

SOCRATES: I believe that you and I and the rest of the world all believe that committing injustice is worse than suffering it, and that escaping punishment worse than being punished. b

POLUS: And I believe that neither I nor anyone else in the world believes it. So, you'd choose rather to suffer injustice rather than to do it.

SOCRATES: Yes, and so would you and everyone else.

POLUS: Far from it: neither I nor you nor anybody else would.

SOCRATES: Then you'll answer? c

POLUS: I certainly will, since I am eager to know what on earth you're going to say.

SOCRATES: Well, in order to find out, then, tell me, as though I were asking you all over again, Polus, which of the two seems to you to be worse—committing injustice or suffering it?

POLUS: Suffering it.

SOCRATES: Now again, which is more shameful—committing injustice or suffering it?

⁷ Socrates is probably referring to the Arginusae case of 406, which he alludes to in the Apology (32b-c). If the remark is quite ironic. It was generally agreed by this time that Socrates had been right in that matter, and six men may have died because the rest of the council didn't side with him.

Answer.

POLUS: Committing it.

SOCRATES: And it's worse if it's more shameful?

POLUS: Not at all.

SOCRATES: I see. You think, apparently, that admirable isn't the same as the good, nor the bad as the shameful.⁸ d

POLUS: That's right.

SOCRATES: But what about this? When you call anything admirable—for example, bodies and colors and shapes and sounds and observances—isn't it with a view to something that you say it's admirable in each case? First, when you say that admirable bodies are admirable, it must be either with a view to their use for some particular purpose they may serve or some pleasure that arises in the act of looking at them when they cause delight to the viewer. In the case of the admirableness of bodies do you have anything to say besides this? e

POLUS: No, I don't.

SOCRATES: And so on with all the rest, whether they're shapes or colors, isn't it for some pleasure or benefit or both that you give them the name "admirable"?

POLUS: It is.

SOCRATES: And sounds too, and musical things, aren't these all the same way?

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And what about legal and customary things, surely their admirableness cannot lie beyond the limits of being either beneficial or pleasant or both.

POLUS: No, I don't think they do.

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SOCRATES: And isn't it the same with the admirableness of studies too?

⁸ "Admirable" here translates "*kalon*," a term of commendation that encompasses everything from physical beauty to aristocratic birth, to moral nobility. "Admirable" has this same range, but is unlike "*kalon*" in that it's derived from the verb "admire." In this respect "*kalon*" is more like "beautiful" or "fine," words that are often used to translate it.

POLUS: Doubtless; and this time, Socrates, your definition is quite admirable, when you define the admirable by pleasure and the good.

SOCRATES: And should the shameful be defined by their opposites, pain and the bad?

POLUS: Necessarily.

SOCRATES: Thus when one of two admirable things is more admirable, this is because it surpasses the other in one of these two, either in pleasure, or in benefit, or in both.

POLUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And again, when one of two shameful things is more shameful, this will be due to an excess either of pain or of badness. Isn't that necessarily so? b

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Come on, then, what was it we heard just now about doing and suffering injustice? Weren't you saying that suffering injustice is worse, but doing it more shameful?

POLUS: I was.

SOCRATES: Well now, if committing injustice is more shameful than suffering it, it is either more painful and shameful by an exceeding the other in pain, or it's more shameful because it exceeds it in badness, or both. Doesn't this also have to be the case?

POLUS: Yes, of course.

SOCRATES: Then let us first consider whether committing injustice exceeds suffering it in pain. Are those who commit injustices are more pained than those who suffer them? c

POLUS: Not so at all, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then it does not exceed in pain?

POLUS: No, indeed.

SOCRATES: And so, if not in pain, it can no longer be said to exceed in both?

POLUS: Apparently.

SOCRATES: It remains, then, that it exceeds in the other?

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: In badness.

POLUS: So it seems.

SOCRATES: Then it is by an excess of badness that committing injustice is more shameful than suffering it.

POLUS: Yes, obviously.

SOCRATES: Now it is surely admitted by the majority of mankind, as it was by you too in our talk a while ago, that committing injustice is more shameful than suffering it.

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And now it has been found to be worse.

POLUS: So it seems.

SOCRATES: Then would you rather have something that is worse and more shameful or something that is less bad and shameful? Don't shrink from answering, Polus you won't get hurt by it. Submit yourself bravely to the argument, as to a doctor, and reply yes or no to my question.

POLUS: No, I wouldn't, Socrates.

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SOCRATES: And would anybody else in the world?

POLUS: I don't think so, not by this account at least.

SOCRATES: Then I spoke the truth when I said that neither you nor anyone else in the world would choose to commit injustice rather than to suffer it, since it really is worse.

POLUS: Apparently.

SOCRATES: So you see, Polus, that when one proof is contrasted with the other they have no resemblance, but whereas you have the assent of everyone else except myself, I am satisfied with your assent alone; though you're just one person, I'll take your vote alone and disregard the rest.

PUNISHMENT IS GOOD FOR THE SOUL

Socrates: Now let's leave this matter where it stands, and proceed next to examine the second part on which we found ourselves at issue—whether the worst thing for a criminal is to pay the penalty (as you thought), or whether it's even worse for him to escape it (as I thought). Let's look at it this way: do you call paying the just penalty, and being justly punished, for a crime the same thing? 476

POLUS: I do.

SOCRATES: And can you deny then that all just things are admirable, insofar as they are just? Consider well before you speak. b

POLUS: No, I think they are admirable, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then take another point: if a man takes any action, doesn't there have to be something that is also acted upon by this agent?⁹

POLUS: I think so.

SOCRATES: And does this thing undergo what the agent does, in the way that the agent does it? I mean, for example, when someone hits a blow then there must be something that's hit?

POLUS: It must.

SOCRATES: And if the hitter hits hard or quickly, the thing that's hit is hit in the same way? c

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: So the so the hit thing is hit in the way the hitter hits it?

POLUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And so again, if someone scorches, there must be something that's scorched?

POLUS: Yes, of course.

SOCRATES: And if he scorches severely or painfully, the scorched thing is scorched in the way that the scorcher scorched it?

⁹ Recall that an agent is anyone or anything that *does* something. A more literal translation of the Greek word would be "maker" or "doer".

POLUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And again, if someone cuts, the same can be said? For something is cut.

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And if the cut is large or deep or sore, the cut made in the cut thing is such as the cutter cut it?

POLUS: Apparently.

SOCRATES: Then summing it up, if you agree that what I was just saying applies to all cases: does the patient undergo what the agent does in the way that the agent does it?¹⁰

POLUS: I agree.

SOCRATES: Then since this has been admitted, is paying the penalty undergoing something, or doing it?

POLUS: It must be undergoing, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Something that's done by an agent?

POLUS: Yes, of course, by the punisher.

SOCRATES: And someone who punishes correctly punishes justly?

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POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Thereby acting justly, or not?

POLUS: Justly.

SOCRATES: And the one who pays the penalty by being punished undergoes something that's just?

POLUS: Apparently.

SOCRATES: And, I think we agreed that what's just is admirable?

POLUS: Certainly.

¹⁰ Recall that our word "patient," derives from the word translated "suffer" or "undergo". A patient is someone who "suffers" or "undergoes" something.

SOCRATES: Then of these two, the one does something admirable, and the other—the one who is punished—undergoes it?

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And so, if it's admirable it's good? Since it must either be pleasant or beneficial.¹¹

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POLUS: It must be so.

SOCRATES: So someone who pays the penalty undergoes something good?

POLUS: It seems so.

SOCRATES: And he is benefited?

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Is it the benefit I imagine? Does his soul become better if he is justly punished?

POLUS: Likely.

SOCRATES: Then is the one who pays the penalty cured from something bad in his soul?

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And so he's cured of the worst thing? Look at it this way; in a man's financial condition do you find anything bad other than poverty?

b

POLUS: No, only poverty.

SOCRATES: And what in his physical condition? There you'd say that badness is weakness or disease or ugliness or the like?

POLUS: I would.

SOCRATES: And in soul too you believe there is a certain vice?

POLUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: And don't you call this injustice, ignorance, cowardice, and so forth?

¹¹ Recall that this was agreed above at 474d-e.

POLUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: So now in these three things—one's finances, one's body, and one's soul—you have mentioned three vices—poverty, disease, and injustice.

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then which of these vices is the most shameful? Isn't it injustice—in short, the vice of the soul?

POLUS: By far the most shameful.

SOCRATES: And if the most shameful, then also worst?

POLUS: How do you mean, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Just this: the most shameful is most shameful in each case because it produces the greatest pain or harm or both; this follows from our previous admissions.

POLUS: Quite so.

SOCRATES: And most shameful of all, we've just agreed, is injustice and, in general, vice of soul?

POLUS: Yes, we have.

SOCRATES: So then either it is most painful, that is, the most shameful of these vices by an excess of painfulness, or else it's the most shameful by an excess of harmfulness, or else in both ways?

POLUS: Necessarily.

SOCRATES: Then do you think that being unjust, licentious, cowardly, and ignorant is more painful than being poor and sick?

POLUS: No, I don't, Socrates, from what we've said.

SOCRATES: Then it must be by exceeding the others by some monstrously great harm and astonishing badness that the soul's vice is the most shameful of all, since it doesn't exceed in pain, according to what you've said.

POLUS: Apparently.

SOCRATES: But further, I suppose, whatever has an excess of harm in the greatest measure, must be the worst thing there is?

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: So injustice, licentiousness, and in general, vice of soul, are the worst things there are?

POLUS: Apparently.

SOCRATES: Now what is the art that cures poverty? Isn't it finance?

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And what cures disease? Isn't it medicine?

POLUS: It must be.

SOCRATES: And what cures vice and injustice? If you don't have an answer ready, consider it this way: where and to whom do we take people who are physically sick? 478

POLUS: To the doctor, Socrates.

SOCRATES: And where do we take criminals and licentious people?

POLUS: Do you mean to court?

SOCRATES: Yes, and isn't it so that they'll pay the penalty?

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now don't the people who punish correctly do so by using some sort of justice?

POLUS: Clearly.

SOCRATES: Then finance cures us from poverty, medicine from disease, and justice from licentiousness and injustice. b

POLUS: Apparently.

SOCRATES: Which then is the most admirable of these things?

POLUS: Of what things?

SOCRATES: Of finance, medicine, and justice.

POLUS: Justice is far above the others, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then, if it's the most admirable, it causes either the most pleasure or the most benefit or both.

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well then, is it pleasant to be medically treated, and do those who undergo such treatment enjoy it?

POLUS: I don't think so.

SOCRATES: But it is beneficial, isn't it?

POLUS: Yes. c

SOCRATES: Because one is cured from something very bad. That's why it's worth it to endure the pain and get well.

POLUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: Then is the happiest physical state for a man to be in that of being medically treated or that of never being sick at all?

POLUS: Clearly, never being sick.

SOCRATES: Yes. For it seems that what we regarded as happiness is never having something bad, rather than being cured from it.

POLUS: That's right.

SOCRATES: Well now, take two persons who have something bad either in their bodies or in their souls. Which is more miserable, the one who is medically treated and is cured from the bad thing, or the one who isn't treated and keeps it? d

POLUS: To my thinking, the one who isn't treated.

SOCRATES: And we found that paying the penalty is a cure for the worst thing, vice.

POLUS: We did.

SOCRATES: Because, I suppose, the justice of the court reforms us and makes us most just, and acts as a medicine for vice.

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Therefore the happiest person is the one who has no vice in his soul, since e

we found the vice of the soul to be the worst thing.

POLUS: Clearly.

SOCRATES: Next in line, I take it, is the person who's cured of it.

POLUS: So it seems.

SOCRATES: And this is the one who is lashed and lectured and made to pay the penalty.

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: So the one with the worst life is the one who has the vice and is not cured from it.

POLUS: Apparently.

SOCRATES: And isn't this the man who commits the greatest crimes in the most unjust way and manages to escape lectures and punishment and paying the penalty, as you say Archelaus and all the other the tyrants and orators and princes have managed to do? 479

POLUS: So it seems.

SOCRATES: Because, as I understand it, my excellent friend, what these people have worked out for themselves is just like a man's managing to escape undergoing the doctor's penalty for his bodily faults (the prescribed treatments), though he's contracted the worst diseases, because he has a childish fear of cauterization of incision which are so painful. Or don't you agree? b

POLUS: I do.

SOCRATES: It seems that he does this because he's ignorant of the virtue of bodily health and fitness. On the basis of what we've now agreed, Polus, something like this is probably also done by people who try to avoid paying the appropriate penalty. They perceive its painfulness, but they're blind to its benefits, and they're unaware of how much more miserable it is to live with a soul that is not healthy, but vicious, unjust, and impious, than it is to be physically unhealthy. That's why they do everything they can—providing themselves with money and friends and the ability to excel in persuasive speech—to avoid paying the penalty and being cured from the worst thing. But if what we have agreed is true, Polus, don't you see the consequences of our argument? Or should we now lay them out? c

POLUS: Yes, if you do not mind.

SOCRATES: Isn't one consequence that injustice and crime is the worst thing?

POLUS: Yes, apparently.

SOCRATES: And further, it appeared that paying the penalty is a cure for this bad thing? d

POLUS: It looks like it.

SOCRATES: Whereas not paying it is a way of retaining the bad thing in us?

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: So crime is the second worst thing; but to commit injustice without paying the penalty is the worst and takes the first place among all bad things.

POLUS: It seems so.

SOCRATES: Well then, my friend, wasn't this the point at issue between us? You considered Archelaus, who committed the greatest injustice, happy because he paid no penalty, while I on the contrary thought that anyone—whether Archelaus or whoever else you like—who don't pay any penalty for the injustice he commits, is peculiarly miserable—the most miserable of men—and that the criminal is always more miserable than his victim, and the unpunished criminal more than the punished one? Isn't this what I said? e

POLUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And hasn't it been proved that it is true?

POLUS: Apparently.

A TARGET TO AIM AT IN LIFE

SOCRATES: If the temperate soul is good, then a soul that is in the opposite state to this temperate one is bad; and that was the licentious soul. Moreover, the temperate man will do what is appropriate to both gods and to men; for he could not be temperate, if he did what was inappropriate. That must be so. Also, when he does what is appropriate to men, his actions will be just; and when he does it to gods, his actions will be pious; and someone who does what is just and pious must be a just and pious man. That is so. And surely he must also be courageous: for it's not like a temperate man to pursue and avoid inappropriate things, but to avoid and pursue the appropriate things (whether they are 507a b

actions or people or pleasures or pains) and to be steadfast and to endure them when he should. Therefore, it follows by strict necessity, Callicles, that the temperate man, who, as we've explained, is just and courageous and pious, is a completely good man.¹² It also follows that a good man does whatever he does well and admirably and that someone who does well is blessed and happy, whereas a vicious man or criminal is miserable. This must be the man who is opposite to the temperate one—the licentious man that you were praising. So this is my account of these things. And I say that this is the truth.

And if this is true, it seems that anyone who desires to be happy must pursue and practice temperance, and flee from licentiousness, as fast as his feet will carry him. He must try, if possible, to not need to be disciplined; but if he needs it—either for himself or for any of his people, whether it's an individual or a city—then he must pay what's appropriate and he must be disciplined, if he is to be happy. This is the target which I think a man look to throughout life; he should concentrate all his own efforts and his city's on this one task of providing a man with the justice and temperance that are needed in order to be blessed. He should not let his appetites go unrestrained or attempt to satisfy them—an interminable trouble—leading the life of a robber. For such a man cannot be loved by any of his fellow men nor by the god, since he cannot be a partner and there can be no friendship without partnership.

SOCRATES' ETHICAL CONCLUSIONS AND THEIR STATUS

SOCRATES: Let's consider what you've been reproaching me for and see whether or not you're right.¹³ You say that I'm unable to stand up for myself or any of my friends or relations, or to save them from the gravest dangers—that I'm exposed like an outcast to the whim of anyone who decides to “kick my ass” (as you insolently put it), or to strip me of my property or banish me from the city, or, ultimately, to put me to death. According to your account, to be in such a position is the most shameful thing of all. My account has been stated many times already, but there's nothing to prevent me from stating it once again. Callicles, I deny that the most shameful thing is to have my “ass kicked” unjustly or to have my body or my purse cut. I think that to kick or to cut me or my possessions unjustly is even more shameful and bad, and, similarly, that stealing and kidnapping and housebreaking, and, in short, any injustice whatsoever done to me or my possessions is worse and more shameful for the criminal than it is for me, his victim.

¹² It is not clear whether this Callicles is a historical person or a character Plato invented. In the dialogue he is Gorgias' host in Athens. He becomes Socrates primary interlocutor at 481b when he claims that Polus was refuted by Socrates because he was too ashamed to admit what he truly believes—that injustice is *better* than justice. (Earlier, at 461b, Polus himself had taken over the argument from Gorgias, who Polus claimed was refuted by Socrates only because he was ashamed to admit that he did not know what was just or how to teach it.) Callicles champions injustice, maintaining that the superior should take advantage of the inferior. He equates the good or happiness with pleasure, and consequently distains temperance and praises its opposite, licentiousness.

¹³ At 484c-486d Callicles made several criticisms of Socrates. Philosophy, he maintained, is a suitable pass time when one is young but is ridiculous for an adult, and spending too much time on it can ruin one by making one inexperienced in the ways of the world. Because of it, Socrates lacks the rhetorical ability needed to persuade assemblies and therefore to have power in a city. Thus he is in the shameful and unmanly position of being unable to defend himself in court.

I'd say that all these things, which were made evident earlier in our conversation, are secured and bound—to put it crudely—with accounts made of iron and steel. So it seems that if you or someone more insolent cannot undo them, then nothing other than what I'm saying now can be right. But, for my part, the story is always the same. I do not know in what way these things are so, but of all the people I've met so far, no one has been able to say anything else without making himself ridiculous. So once more I assume that these things are so. 509