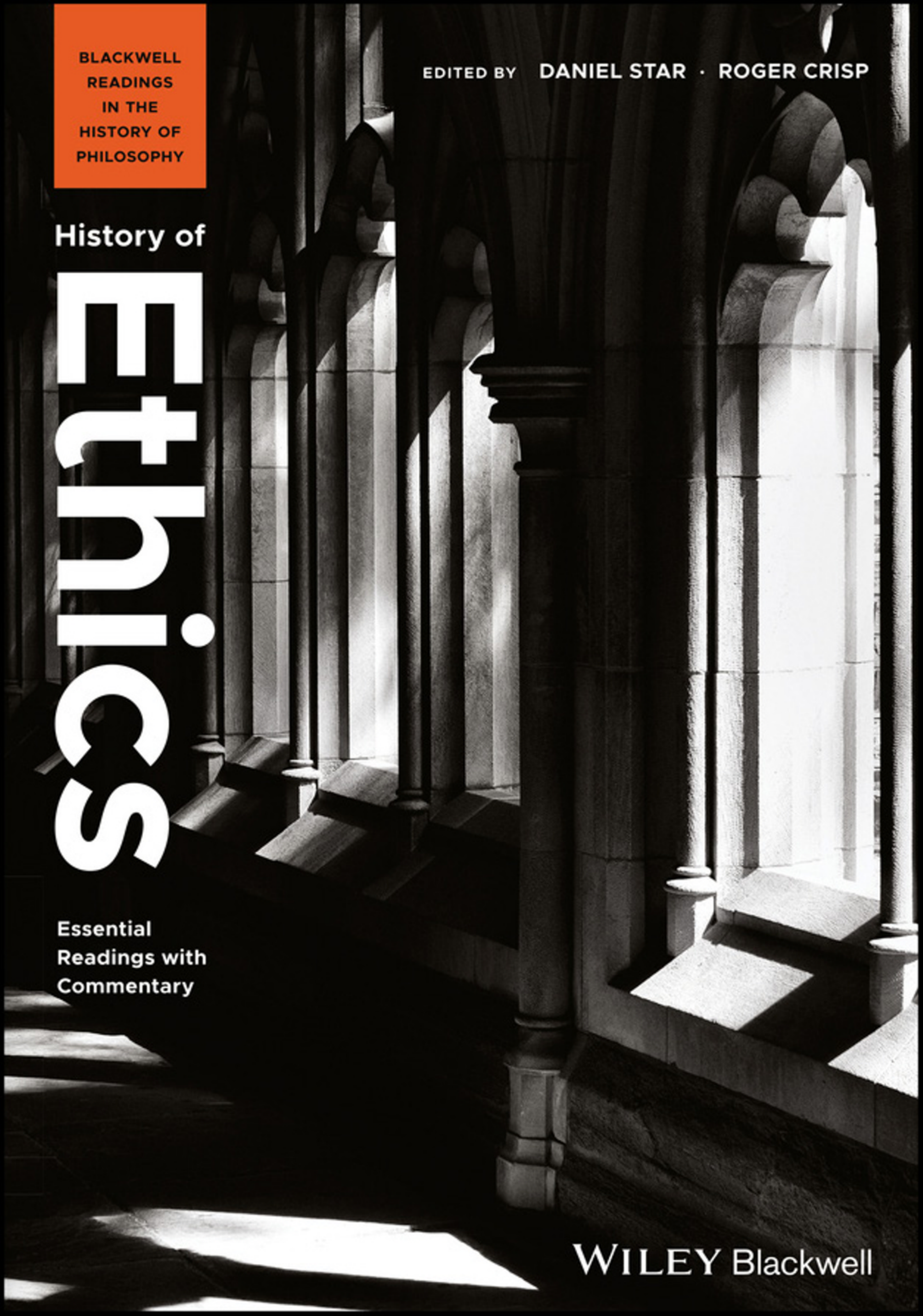

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History of Ethics

Essential Readings with Commentary

Edited by

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Boston University, United States

and

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University of Oxford, United Kingdom

WILEY Blackwell

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Introduction

This is a book of selections from the history of Western moral philosophy ('ethics' for short), accompanied by introductory commentaries that are intended to be helpful for students new to the topic. The history of ethics in the Western world is extremely rich and varied. It is not possible to capture its complexity in a tidy narrative or a short series of commentaries. Nonetheless, when one is new to a large subject like this, it can be very helpful to be provided with stories that highlight many of the main elements of the subject. With such stories in hand, one can find it easier to interpret what one is reading, even if further study would lead one to outgrow the stories that were of help at the beginning. Despite the necessary limitations of stories like those we provide herein, one would make very slow progress without them. All this is to say that the commentary in this book is intended to be modest but useful. It is not meant to be a substitute for the readings themselves, or for the large secondary literature.

The needs of both students and professors guided us in the selection of source materials, but the primary aim was to provide a well-rounded, thorough, yet not overly long selection of texts that students might reasonably hope to complete reading in a semester. This made for some difficult decisions about what to include and what to omit. It was decided that some texts, or parts of texts, that are often omitted in other collections should be included (e.g. Aquinas on self-defense, Kant on virtue, and a wide range of excerpts from Sidgwick's *Methods*). At the same time, we were aware that many worthy philosophical works could not be included. When it came to twentieth century philosophy, we had to be particularly choosy, stopping in the 1970s and concentrating on (i) the rise of contemporary metaethics; and (ii) philosophers whose work counts as original, but whose ideas students might find it particularly fruitful to compare to the ideas of earlier philosophers in this volume.

Several themes weave through the history of Western moral philosophy. Here we will discuss four. Unless otherwise noted, the philosophers mentioned are all represented by selections from their writings in this volume, and when we refer to them by name we have these selections in mind.

1. The need to justify adherence to morality, especially in the light of the egoist challenge

One of the most important features of Ancient Greek ethics was a concern to answer skeptical challenges to the putative authority of morality, especially the concern that self-interest and morality might come apart from each other, and that, if they do, it might be rational to pursue one's own self-interest, rather than act morally. The selections here start with Plato addressing skeptical challenges to morality. One goal of the *Republic* is to establish that it is actually in the best interest of individual citizens for them to be just – that is, virtuous. The egoist challenge is not the only skeptical challenge to morality that we see Plato address, but he appears to think it is the most serious. Aristotle's *Ethics*, on the other hand, does not explicitly address egoists. Nonetheless, it is concerned with showing that individual flourishing or happiness consists in living a life of virtuous activity.

If one way to attempt to reconcile morality and self-interest involves seeking to demonstrate that a life of virtue is the best life to lead, a second, modern approach involves starting with an amoral account of self-interest, and attempting to demonstrate that morality itself has its foundations in self-interest (so understood). Hobbes's social contract theory is the most well-known approach of the second kind.

Hobbes's account of morality as an institution with its foundations in appeals to self-interest was a significant intellectual achievement, but it did not put an end to the continuing concern with the issue of how best to reconcile morality and self-interest. Butler's approach to this issue exhibits more continuity with the views of Plato and Aristotle than Hobbes's, but it demonstrates a heightened recognition that the motive of self-interest is distinct from moral motivation, even though the two can, in his view, work in harmony. According to Kant, the truly rational person will always act morally (or, when pursuing his own happiness, which Kant thinks it is often permissible to do, will always respect the limits on doing so imposed on us by our moral duties). At the same time as he argues for this ideal, Kant expresses pessimism about our ability to live up to it, and about our tendency to deceive ourselves as to our true motives: we often take ourselves to be acting morally when we are really acting out of self-interest. Nietzsche's account of morality is very different than Hobbes's, but he too views it as an institution with a history. Nietzsche has much less time for a priori reasoning than Hobbes and much more skepticism about the value of morality; for Nietzsche, morality has its origins in a complex series of events by which the weak came to exercise control over the strong, and its present status is tainted by history, as it continues to hold worthy people back from genuinely flourishing. Finally, Sidgwick, inspired by Butler but also by the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill, finds himself unable to locate rational arguments that will allow him to conclude either that morality can be reconciled with self-interest, or that morality always trumps self-interest. As a result, Sidgwick somewhat reluctantly concludes that there is a basic 'dualism of practical reason', such that, so far as reason is concerned, there is no criterion for deciding between rational egoism and impartial benevolence (utilitarianism).

Whether or not one believes the skeptical challenge to morality that comes from rational egoist quarters is worth all the attention it has received, it should be said that it has encouraged a long history of reflection concerning the exact nature of human wellbeing. We are all interested in this topic, which can be considered in isolation from the skeptical challenge. Or we should be, anyway: do we not each want to know how to make our own life go well? This is a popular topic in contemporary ethics, where the comparative strengths and weaknesses of a range of sophisticated accounts of wellbeing have received much discussion. In the present volume, Epicurus and Epictetus might be considered examples of philosophers who take it to be their very first order of business to determine what the good life consists in. When we consider Epicurus, in particular, we find a philosopher for whom defending an account of wellbeing, i.e. hedonism (the view that wellbeing consists in the experience of pleasure), was, arguably, his primary aim. The utilitarian philosophers of the modern era (Bentham, Mill, and Sidgwick) are also interested in determining what happiness consists in, due to the fact that they take it that the fundamental moral truth is that we should each act so as to produce the most happiness it is possible for us to produce.

Some challenges to morality are not motivated by either thought of the egoist alternative or the 'might makes right' amoralism of Callicles and Thrasymachus (see the first selections from Plato). There is no reason to think that modern moral sceptics, like Ayer and Mackie, are at all motivated by either amoral or immoral attitudes (Nietzsche is a more difficult case to classify here). Rather, they are led to endorse various forms of anti-realism due to more philosophical concerns. We return to these thinkers later.

2. Understanding virtue and moral psychology

Ancient philosophers, generally speaking, took a longer view in ethics than modern philosophers. They were concerned to answer the question 'How should one live?' which includes not only the question so central to modern ethics ('How should one act?), but also the question of what kind of person one should be – what kind of character one should have. This distinction should not be exaggerated, as it might be claimed to be in Anscombe's famous article 'Modern Moral Philosophy', which was one of the driving forces behind the development of modern 'virtue ethics', discussed further in section 4. Plato and Aristotle are indeed concerned about how one should act, but to a greater extent than many moderns they recognize the influence of character on action and hence the importance of moral education.

According to Plato, the virtuous life (which is the same as the happy life) consists of possessing the virtue of justice, broadly understood. This includes the more specific virtues of wisdom, courage, and moderation. Aristotle's list of virtues was significantly longer, including for example generosity and even wit; but like Plato, he insists on the centrality of wisdom or knowledge to each virtue. It is instructive to compare these lists of virtues with the cardinal virtues of Aquinas (prudence, justice, temperance, and wisdom) and to ponder the significance of the lack of attention paid by recent virtue ethicists to developing lists of their own. This may be because ancient philosophers tended to be thinking and writing not primarily for fellow academics, but for people in general, with a view to changing their lives – though again this is a contrast that should not be overdrawn.

The philosopher most influential on modern thought about the virtues is, without doubt, Aristotle, although Plato, Hume, Nietzsche, and others have provided important inspiration. But we can discern a break from the ancient tradition in the unwillingness of most moderns to argue for the equivalence of virtue and happiness. This may well be partly the result of the work on the relation of virtue and happiness by Butler and Sidgwick, and Kant's attempt to provide morality with an autonomous foundation of its own.

Another contrast between modern and earlier thinkers lies in the role of knowledge in virtue. For Plato, the truly virtuous person is the one who has knowledge of the 'Forms', and the acquisition of such knowledge requires a long and arduous intellectual process over many decades. Both Augustine and Aquinas see belief in and understanding of God to be essential to virtue. But more recent secular or less centrally theological accounts of virtue, such as those of Hume and Smith, have tended to emphasize to a great extent the important of sympathy and compassion.

A further difference between ancient and later thinkers lies in the importance of success. For Aristotle, happiness lies in the noble or virtuous life, and this requires successfully performing various virtuous actions. A genuine intention to act virtuously that fails is not sufficient. After Aristotle, and with the development of Christianity, we see developing a view that could be called volitionalism, according to which moral value lies only in one's intentions, not in the actions or outcomes to which they lead. Kant was a volitionalist, and what matters for him is the good will, which is of unconditional value even if for whatever reason its aims are not accomplished. The clash between on the one hand our continuing inclination to reward success and on the other hand our recognition of the attractions of volitionalism lead to the problem of moral luck, outlined so clearly by Smith.

Another central question in moral psychology concerns the nature of moral motivation. The Aristotelian virtuous person is never conflicted. They are brought up well to find pleasure in virtuous actions, and will even die on the battlefield without any urge to run, knowing that to do so would be to damage their own chances of true happiness (since fleeing would be vicious, it would make them unhappy). For Kant, however, moral motivation is a matter not so much of 'sainthood', but of 'heroism'. For Kant, moral worth lies in the victory of reason over the passions, and there can be no such victory if the passions are on the same side. One important question for Kantian ethicists is how this view of moral worth can sit alongside Kant's view that moral virtue plays a significant role in ethics and is to be encouraged.

3. Understanding the nature of moral thought and language

In twentieth century philosophy, a useful (some have thought problematic) distinction arose between 'metaethics' and 'normative ethics'. The first is the part of ethics that is concerned with the nature of moral truths (or lack of them, for anti-realists), moral language and thought, and moral knowledge. The second concerns itself with the articulation and defense of moral principles. A complete account of ethics would include both metaethics and normative ethics. When we look at earlier philosophers like Hume and Kant, we can see both domains of philosophical reflection, although this distinction is not explicitly drawn (interestingly, metaethics and normative ethics are more distinct and separable in the work of some philosophers, e.g. Hume, than in the work of others, e.g. Kant).

To start with metaethics, three related issues became particularly important in the modern era: (i) the place of ethical facts in the universe as revealed to us by modern science; (ii) the autonomy of moral reasoning, with respect to reasoning about the natural world; and (iii) the philosophical consequences of a special motivating role that many philosophers believe moral judgements play in our psychology. We'll briefly discuss each in turn.

The idea that there are important differences between ethics, as a subject, and scientific study of the world was recognized by the ancients. Aristotle suggested, for instance, that we should not expect the same degree of precision in ethics as we are able to achieve in science. Nonetheless, it was only with the arrival of modern science (an extremely long and complex event, stretching from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century) that a picture of the natural world arose that seemed to some to threaten the idea that there can be objective moral facts or truths. According to Aristotelian science and the Christian orthodoxy that incorporated it (Aquinas's efforts here were especially significant), everything in nature has a *telos*, or purpose. Modern science gradually overturned this idea, leaving human goals and the principles by which we might think they are morally constrained or promoted, looking somewhat unmoored in the natural world: what, in the world, could a moral fact *be*, given that we don't find any need to posit moral facts in the natural sciences? One response, which we saw earlier when discussing Hobbes, was to view such facts as constructed out of self-interest. Another, found in Smith and Hume, was to view them as determined by the point of view of an idealized, emotionally sophisticated human observer. There is also the possibility of accepting that moral principles are not known through empirical reflection, but as a priori, self-evident truths (Kant, Sidgwick, Moore, and Ross are all important thinkers in this tradition). One might think such truths exist in a Platonic realm separate from the natural world, or in our rational capacities, or can be derived from our moral concepts (the first view is the hardest to square with secular naturalism). More skeptical responses are also available, as we see when we come to Ayer and Mackie.

A closely related, but independent, concern can be found in Hume. This is the idea that it is never possible to deduce an 'ought' from an 'is'. When we engage in moral reasoning, Hume contends, there is never any room for reasoning that moves from claims about the way the world is to claims about the way we should act. Strictly speaking, this could be true even if we have a naturally given purpose in the universe, since we might still ask, 'Why should I do what my natural purpose would have me do?' (perhaps this wouldn't make sense if we were not able to make free choices, but philosophers in the Aristotelian and Christian traditions that we have in mind generally take it that we are able to act freely). This thought that reasoning concerning morality is *autonomous* is widely accepted in modern philosophy: Kant, Sidgwick, Moore, Ayer, and others disagree about many things, but not about this. Mill, however, is an exception. Although he was, like Hume, a naturalist, and an empiricist in his general methodology, his 'proof of utilitarianism', difficult as it is to interpret, appears to violate Hume's stricture that we cannot deduce an 'ought' from an 'is' (and consequently, few philosophers have been moved by it).

Closely related to Hume's principle is Moore's 'naturalistic fallacy', a term that Moore uses to refer to attempts to provide naturalistic definitions of moral terms, all of which are committing a significant error, he thinks. Moore, like Ross and Sidgwick, adopts a metaphysics known as 'non-naturalism' and an accompanying epistemology generally referred to as 'intuitionism' (Sidgwick explicitly distinguished between good and bad forms of intuitionism).

Hume also famously claimed that 'reason is and ought only to be the slave of the passions', rejecting the ancient claim (also subsequently defended by Kant) that it is the faculty of reason's job to exercise control over our individual psychologies, and that it is only by reason doing this job properly that we are able to act in a morally proper fashion. In the present context, the relevance of Hume's approach to understanding our psychology is that he draws attention to the problem of explaining how it is that mere beliefs, absent corresponding desires, might motivate us to act (he claims that mere belief, or the mere use of reason, in the absence of relevant desires, cannot motivate us). Ethics is first and foremost a practical enterprise, and if someone claims that he or she ought to do a certain act, it seems highly peculiar for them not to be motivated to do it. Unlike the first two issues in metaethics, not all moral philosophers since Hume have thought there is really a problem here: non-naturalist intuitionists like Sidgwick, Moore, and Ross do not seem moved by this issue. However, other philosophers, including especially Ayer, as well as many subsequent metaethicists, take this to be a key reason for being suspicious of non-naturalist intuitionism, since its defenders standardly do not attempt to explain how it is that our desires are able to take their leave from self-evidently true propositions.

Although Ayer has no time for Moore's non-naturalist intuitionism, both philosophers share an appreciation of the 'is'/'ought' gap, as well as an interest in understanding moral language. The turn to the study of language that occurred in 'analytic' philosophy in the twentieth century is on display in the excerpts from Ayer and Moore. Frankena's response to Moore (also included here) is instructive partly because it shows up some limitations in Moore's approach of basing philosophical arguments on certain features of our language. Philosophy of language continues to be an important part of contemporary philosophy, but the relationship between language and metaphysics is now generally thought to be considerably more complex than it was in Moore's time.

4. Formulating and defending particular principles of morality

Although the goal of formulating and defending particular principles of morality is not wholly modern (early examples might be thought to include Plato's account of what justice consists in, and Aquinas's account of the doctrine of double effect), it is of explicit interest to modern philosophers: especially, with respect to the present volume, Kant, Bentham, Mill, Sidgwick, Ross, Foot, Rawls, and Hare.

Two types of moral principle are worth contrasting here. Principles can be restricted in domain, or they can be maximally general. Examples of the first kind are defended herein by Aquinas, Foot, and Rawls. Aquinas and Foot are each concerned to defend their own versions of the doctrine of double effect (in Foot's case, one might more accurately say she ends up defending a descendant of that doctrine). In the relevant excerpt from Aquinas, we see the principle cast in terms of self-defense, but it is also mentioned that it will have application to cases involving soldiers fighting in a war (this is one domain in which reasoning that involves this doctrine continues to be popular). Foot more carefully investigates various ways in which one might understand the relevant principle (although Aquinas comes at the beginning, and Foot at the end, of a long Catholic tradition of discussion of this principle or doctrine, Foot's discussion is novel and not constrained by tradition). In neither case does the philosopher in question ask us to take the principle at issue to be the single fundamental principle of ethics, as its domain of application is restricted (it doesn't have anything to tell us about acts of charity, for instance). Similarly, in defending an account of political justice, with respect to social institutions, Rawls is clear about the fact that he is not providing a complete moral theory, let alone very general, fundamental moral principles. We can contrast these examples with Kant's search for a 'supreme principle of morality'. Each of his formulations of this principle is meant to tell us something about the permissibility of acts in general: that is, acts of any and every kind. Similarly, the utilitarian principle defended by Bentham, Mill, Sidgwick, and Hare (each in their own way) is all encompassing with respect to human actions.

Two negative reactions to this interest amongst philosophers in locating correct moral principles are also worth highlighting. First, an interest in the first half of the twentieth century in focusing, first and foremost, on investigating the nature of *language* led philosophers like Ayer to view normative ethics as something that does not really belong to philosophy proper. For a time, 'analytic philosophy' was almost synonymous with 'philosophy of language', and normative ethics began to decline in popularity. More importantly in the long term, a return to an interest in virtue, initiated by Anscombe (in the paper republished here), was driven initially by the thought that the modern interest in articulating and defending moral principles of right and wrong action represented a mistaken turn in the history of ethics.

A large part of Anscombe's motivation for this skepticism regarding the enterprise of discussing moral principles rested on a view about the difference between religious and secular ethics: if the notion of obligation only makes sense within a religious framework, then it makes more sense, she argued, for secular philosophers to focus on understanding virtue. This latter enterprise, she suggested, is more compatible with a naturalistic conception of the world. The somewhat popular return to virtue initiated by Anscombe has led some subsequent 'virtue ethicists' to continue to be skeptical about the importance of moral principles, while others have defended the idea that principles of right action might themselves be formulated in terms of virtue (on this view, right acts might be those acts virtuous people would do, roughly speaking). Furthermore, some 'particularists' have claimed that moral obligations, or truths about what we ought to do, while talk of them is legitimate and appropriate (few philosophers follow Anscombe in thinking that only the religious are entitled to speak of moral obligations), cannot be captured by or codified in general moral principles.

Part I

Ancient and Medieval Ethics

1

Gorgias and *Republic*: The Authority of Morality

Plato

In the excerpts from *Gorgias* and the *Republic* provided here, Plato presents us with three attempts to call morality or justice into question. The relevant Greek word, *dikaiosunê*, is usually translated as 'justice', but it is very general in scope as Plato uses it, so it might also be translated as 'morality'. The first two attempts, presented by the sophists Callicles and Thrasymachus, are responded to immediately by Socrates – Plato's mouthpiece throughout – who is not prepared to let them represent genuine philosophical options. He takes them to be based on a failure to genuinely appreciate the nature of the subject at hand, a failure that springs from the sophist motivation in using arguments – a sophist's primary aim is to benefit personally by winning arguments, rather than to use arguments to get closer to the truth (in the present day, it can help to think of the differences between debating classes and philosophy classes). We should bear this in mind if at times we feel that Thrasymachus is giving in too easily to some of Socrates's arguments. We may wonder whether Plato has been completely fair to his opponents; but, more positively, we might take it that Plato means to suggest that the other side is not even particularly good at *rationally* defending their own positions – they are accustomed to believing that insults and intellectual bullying will help them achieve their ends just as well, and will simply lose interest in rational argumentation when winning no longer looks likely.

Callicles and Thrasymachus put forward popular and politically potent forms of skepticism that stand in opposition to philosophy. Their approaches are different, and the responses that are required are thus also different: Callicles distinguishes between morality as an artifice designed to protect the weak, and natural justice, which, he takes it, directs the strong to dominate the weak (comparisons with Nietzsche are sometimes made by contemporary scholars), whereas Thrasymachus argues that it is *good* for the strong to dominate the weak. The first position is countered with arguments that challenge the claims about what is natural and what is conventional, whereas the second position is seen to be in need of a response that takes off from noting how strange it is to suppose that justice is bad and injustice good. The short excerpt from *Gorgias* is provided for the sake of contrast (and only the first part of Socrates's response is provided), but the student may particularly benefit from focusing on three of the arguments that Socrates uses against Thrasymachus: (i) from '…I cannot hear without amazement that you class injustice with wisdom and virtue, and justice with the opposite' (348 E) onwards; (ii) from 'You would not deny that a state may be unjust and may be unjustly trying to enslave other states…?' (351 B) onwards; and (iii) from '…whether the just have a better and happier life than the unjust is a further question which we also proposed to consider' (352 D) onwards.

The third of our three challenges is not responded to in as direct or immediate a manner, but Plato sets it out extremely well. It is presented by Glaucon, who, unlike Callicles and Thrasymachus, is genuinely respectful of Socrates. Glaucon is not so much committed to a form of skepticism as seriously worried by

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what he takes to be the strongest form of moral skepticism he can think of, and he hopes that Socrates can free him of his concerns. Glaucon provides us with some wonderful thought experiments that seem to suggest self-interest and morality can irretrievably come apart – there is the story of the Ring of Gyges (which is likely to remind the contemporary reader of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*). But perhaps even more important are the thought experiments that follow it, where we are asked to imagine a moral person whose every action is misinterpreted by others as immoral and who therefore will only ever meet with punishment and derision when acting morally; and an immoral person whose every immoral act is met with rewards and praise.

Glaucon is asking us to fix our minds on the question, do I always have overwhelming reasons to be moral? The challenge provided by Glaucon's thought experiments is simply one that asks how morality could be such that we each have reasons to follow it even when it appears to conflict with self-interest. Plato recognizes that *this* challenge is a serious one, and one can read the remainder of the *Republic* as an attempt to answer it.

In order to answer Glaucon's challenge, Plato's Socrates first says that it will be necessary to provide a detailed account of morality or justice in individual persons (in other words, an account of the moral or just individual). Plato recognizes that there may be different routes to understanding the nature of morality (in the third excerpt in this book, we will see Plato mentioning a 'longer and more circuitous' route); but the one that he thinks it is best to follow in the *Republic* involves our first looking to ascertain what morality or justice consists of on the level of the ideal community, since this may be easier to ascertain than it would be if we began by first looking at the individual. After we have done this, we can return to morality on the level of the individual with a clearer sense of what we are looking for.

Gorgias

[…]

CALLICLES. The truth is, Socrates, that you, who pretend to be engaged in the pursuit of truth, are appealing now to the popular and vulgar notions of right, which are not natural, but only conventional. Custom and nature *483* are generally at variance with one another: and hence, if a person is too modest to say what he thinks, he is compelled to contradict himself; and you, ingeniously seeing the advantage which may be won from this, dishonestly contrive that when a person speaks according to this rule of custom, you slyly ask him a question, which is to be referred to the rule of nature; and if he is talking of the rule of nature, you slip away to custom: as in this very discussion about doing and suffering injustice, when Polus was speaking of the conventionally dishonorable, you pursued his notion of convention from the point of view of nature; for by the rule of nature, that only is the more disgraceful which is the greater evil – as, for example, to suffer injustice; but by the rule of custom, to do evil is the more disgraceful. For this suffering of injustice is not the part of a man, but of a slave, who indeed had better die than live; for when he is wronged and trampled upon, he is unable to help himself, or any other about whom he cares. The reason, as I conceive, is that the makers of laws are the many weak; and they make laws and distribute praises and censures with a view to themselves and to their own interests; and they terrify the mightier sort of men, and those who are able to get the better of them, in order that they may not get the better of them; and they say, that dishonesty is shameful and unjust; meaning, when they speak of injustice, the desire to have more than their neighbors, for knowing their own inferiority they are only too glad of equality. And therefore this seeking to have more than the many, is conventionally said to be shameful and unjust, and is called injustice, whereas nature herself intimates that it is just for the better to have more than the worse, the more powerful than the weaker; and in many ways she shows, among men as well as among animals, and indeed among whole cities and races, that justice consists in the superior ruling over and having more than the inferior. For on what principle of justice did Xerxes invade Hellas, or his father the Scythians (not to speak of numberless other examples)? They, I conceive, act according to nature; yes, and according to the law of nature: not, perhaps, according to that artificial law, which *484* we frame and fashion, taking the best and strongest of us from their youth upwards, and taming them like young lions, and charming them with the sound of the voice, saying to them, that with equality they must be content, and that this is the honorable and the just. But if there were a man who had sufficient force, he would shake off and break through, and escape from all this he would trample under foot all our formulas and spells and charms, and all our laws, sinning against nature: the slave would rise in rebellion and be lord over us, and the light of natural justice would shine forth. And this I take to be the lesson of Pindar, in the poem in which he says that –

> 'Law is the king of all, mortals as well as immortals;'

this, as he says,

> 'Makes might to be right, and does violence with exalted hand; as I infer from the deeds of Heracles, for without buying them', –

I do not remember the exact words, but the meaning is that, he carried off the oxen of Geryon without buying them, and without their being given to him by Geryon, according to the law of natural right, and that the oxen and other possessions of the weaker and inferior properly belong to the stronger and superior. And this is true, as you may ascertain, if you will leave philosophy and go on to higher things: for philosophy, Socrates, if pursued in moderation and at the proper age, is an elegant accomplishment, but too much philosophy is the ruin of human life. Even if a man has good parts, still, if he carries philosophy into later life, he is necessarily ignorant of all those things which a gentleman and a person of honor ought to know; for he is ignorant of the laws of the State, and of the language which ought to be used in the dealings of man with man, whether private or public, and altogether ignorant of the pleasures and desires of mankind and of human character in general. And people of this sort, when they betake themselves to politics or business, are as ridiculous as I imagine the politicians to be, when they make their appearance in the arena of philosophy. For, as Euripides says, –

> 'Every man shines in that and pursues that, and devotes the greatest portion of the day to that in which he most excels;'

485 and if he is inferior in anything, he avoids and depreciates that, and praises the other from partiality to himself, and because he thinks that he will thus praise himself. But the right way is to have both: philosophy, as a part of education, is an excellent thing, and there is no disgrace to a man while he is young in pursuing such a study; when, Socrates, he becomes an older man, then the thing is ridiculous, and I feel towards philosophers as I do towards those who lisp and imitate children. For when I see a little child, who is not of an age to speak plainly, lisping at his play, that pleases me; there is an appearance of grace and freedom in his utterance, which is natural to his childish years. But when I hear some small creature carefully articulating his words, that offends me; the sound is disagreeable, and has to my ears the twang of slavery. And when I see a man lisping as if he were a child, that appears to me ridiculous and unmanly and worthy of stripes. Now, I have the same feeling about students of philosophy; when I see one of your young men studying philosophy, that I consider to be quite in character, and becoming a man of a liberal education, and him who neglects philosophy I regard as an inferior man, who will never aspire to anything great or noble. But if I see him continuing to study philosophy in later life, and not leaving off, I think that he ought to be beaten, Socrates; for, as I was saying, such an one, even though he have good natural parts, becomes effeminate. He flies from the busy centre and the market-place, in which, as the poet says, men become distinguished: he creeps into a corner for the rest of his life, and talks in a whisper with three or four admiring youths, but never speaks out like a freeman in a satisfactory manner. Now I, Socrates, am very well inclined towards you, and my feeling may be compared with that of Zethus towards Amphion, in the play of Euripides, of *486* which I was just now speaking: for I am disposed to say to you much what Zethus said to his brother, that you, Socrates, are careless when you ought to be careful; and having a soul so noble, are chiefly remarkable for a puerile exterior; neither in a court of justice could you state a case, or give any probability or proof, nor offer valiant counsel on another's behalf: and you must not be offended, my dear Socrates, for I am speaking out of good-will towards you, if I ask whether you are not ashamed at being in this case? which, indeed, I affirm to be that of all those who will carry the study of philosophy too far. For suppose that some one were to take you, or any one of your sort, off to prison, declaring that you had done wrong when you had done no wrong, you must allow that you would not know what to do: there you would stand giddy and gaping, and not having a word to say; and when you went up before the court, even if the accuser were a poor creature and not good for much, you would die if he were disposed to claim the penalty of death. And yet, Socrates, what is the value of an art which converts a man of sense into a fool, who is helpless, powerless, when the danger is greatest, to save either himself or others; while he is being despoiled by his enemies of all his goods, and deprived of his rights of citizenship? being a man, if I may use the expression, who may be boxed on the ears with impunity. Then, my good friend, take my advice, and refute no more; learn 'the arts of business, and acquire the reputation of wisdom', leaving to others these niceties; whether they are better described as follies or absurdities, they will only give you poverty for the inmate of your dwelling.

Cease, then, emulating these paltry splitters of words, and emulate only the man of substance and honor, who is well to do.

Socrates. If my soul, Callicles, were made of gold, should I not rejoice to discover one of those stones with which they test gold, and one of the best sort too which I might apply? and if the application showed that my soul had been well cultivated, then I should know that I was in a satisfactory state, and that no other test was needed by me.

Cal. What makes you say that, Socrates?

Soc. I will tell you; I think that in you I have found the desired touchstone.

Cal. Why?

Soc. Because I am sure that if you agree with me in any of the opinions which my soul forms, I have at *487* last found the truth indeed. For I consider that if a man is to make a complete trial of the good or evil of the soul, he ought to have three qualities – knowledge, good-will, frankness, which are all possessed by you. Many whom I have known were unable to make the examination, because they were not wise as you are; others are wise, but they will not tell me the truth, because they have not the interest in me which you have; and these two strangers, Gorgias and Polus, are undoubtedly wise men and my very good friends, but they are not frank enough, and they are too modest. Why, their modesty is so great that they are driven to contradict themselves, first one and then the other of them, in the face of a large company, on matters of the highest moment. But you have all the qualities in which these others are deficient, having received an excellent education; to this many Athenians can testify. And I am sure that you are my friend. How do I prove that? I will tell you: I know that you, Callicles, and Tisander of Aphidnae, and Andron the son of Androtion, and Nausicydes of the deme of Cholarges, studied philosophy together: there were four of you, and I once heard you advising with one another as to the extent to which the pursuit should be carried, and the opinion, as I know, which found favor among you was, that the study should not be pushed too much into detail. You were cautioning one another not to be over wise, lest, without your knowing, this should be the ruin of you. And now when I hear you giving the same advice to me which you then gave to your most intimate friends, I have in that a sufficient evidence of your real good-will to me. And of the frankness of your nature and freedom from modesty I am assured by yourself, and the assurance is confirmed by your last speech. Well then, the inference clearly is, that if you and I agree in an argument on any point, that point will have been sufficiently tested by you and me, and will not require to be referred to any further test. For you cannot have been led to agree with me, either from lack of knowledge or from superfluity of modesty, nor from a desire to deceive me, for you are my friend, as you tell me yourself. And therefore when you and I are agreed, the result will be the attainment of the perfect truth. Now there can be no nobler inquiry, Callicles, than that for which you reprove me, – What ought the character of a *488* man to be, and what his pursuits, and how far he is to go, both in maturer years and in youth? For be assured of this, that if I err in my own conduct I do not err intentionally, but from my own ignorance. Do not then desist from advising me, now that you have begun, until I have learned clearly what this is which I am to practice, and how I may acquire it. And if you find me assenting to your words, and hereafter not doing that to which I assented, call me 'dolt', and 'good-for-nothing', and deem me unworthy of receiving further instruction. Once more, then, tell me what you and Pindar mean by natural justice: do you not mean that the superior should take the property of the inferior by force; that the better should rule the worse, the noble have more than the mean? Am I not right in my recollection?

CAL. Yes; that is what I was saying, and what I still maintain.

SOC. And do you mean by the better the same as the superior? for I could not make out what you were saying at the time – whether you meant by the superior the stronger, and that the weaker must obey the stronger, as you seemed to imply when you said that great cities attack small ones In accordance with natural right, because they are superior and stronger, as though the superior and stronger and better were the same; or whether the better may be also the inferior and weaker, and the superior the worse, or whether better is to be defined in the same way as superior: this is the point which I want to have clearly explained. Are the superior and better and stronger the same or different?

CAL. Well; I tell you plainly that they are the same.

SOC. Then the many are by nature superior to the one, against whom, as you were saying, they make the laws?

CAL. Certainly.

SOC. Then the laws of the many are the laws of the superior?

CAL. Very true.

SOC. Then they are the laws of the better; for the superior are far better, as you were saying?

CAL. Yes.

SOC. Then the laws which are made by them are by nature noble, as they are the superior?

CAL. Yes.

SOC. And are not the many of opinion, as you were lately saying, that justice is equality, and that to do *489* is more disgraceful than to suffer injustice? and that equality and not excess is justice? – is that so or no? Answer, Callicles, and let no modesty be found to come in the way: I must beg of you to answer, in order that if you agree with me I may be fortified in my judgment by the assent of so competent an authority.

CAL. Yes; that is the opinion of the many.

SOC. Then not only custom but nature also affirms that to do is more disgraceful than to suffer injustice, and that justice is equality, so that you seem to have been wrong in your former assertion, and accusation of me, when you said that nature and custom are opposed, and that I, knowing this, was artfully playing between them, appealing to custom when the argument is about nature, and to nature when the argument is about custom?

Cal. This man always will be talking nonsense. At your age, Socrates, are you not ashamed to be word-catching, and when a man trips in a word, thinking that to be a piece of luck? do you not see, – have I not told you already, that by superior I mean better? do you imagine me to say, that if a rabble of slaves and nondescripts, who are of no use except perhaps for their physical strength, gets together, their ipsissima verba are laws?

Soc. Ho! my philosopher, is that your line?

Cal. Certainly.

Soc. I was thinking, Callicles, that something of the kind must have been in your mind, and that is why I repeated the question, what is the superior, because I wanted to know clearly what you meant; for you surely do not think that two men are better than one, or that your slaves are better than you because they are stronger? Then please to begin again, and tell me who the better are, if they are not the stronger; and I will ask you to be a little milder in your instructions, or I shall have to run away from you.

Cal. You are ironical.

Soc. No, by the hero Zethus, Callicles, in whose person you were just now saying many ironical things against me, I am not: tell me, then, whom you mean by the better?

Cal. I mean the more excellent.

Soc. Do you not see that you are yourself repeating words and explaining nothing? – will you tell me whether you mean by the better and superior the wiser, or if not, whom?

Cal. Most assuredly, I do mean the wiser.

489 *Soc.* Then according to you, one wise man may often be superior to ten thousand fools, and he ought to rule them, and they ought to be his subjects, and he ought to have more than they should. That is what I believe that you mean (and you must not suppose that I am catching words), if you allow that the one is superior to the ten thousand?

Cal. Yes; that is what I mean, and that is what I conceive to be natural justice, – that the better and wiser should rule and have more than the inferior.

Republic

Book I

[…]

Several times in the course of the discussion Thrasymachus had made an attempt to get the argument into his own hands, and had been put down by the rest of the company, who wanted to hear the end. But when *336 B* Polemarchus and I had done speaking and there was a pause, he could no longer hold his peace; and, gathering himself up, he came at us like a wild beast, seeking to devour us. We were quite panic-stricken at the sight of him.

He roared out to the whole company: What folly, Socrates, has taken possession of you all? And why, sillybillies, *C* do you knock under to one another? I say that if you want really to know what justice is, you should not only ask but answer, and you should not seek honour to yourself from the refutation of an opponent, but have your own answer; for there is many a one who can ask and cannot answer. And now I will not have you say that justice is *D* duty or advantage or profit or gain or interest, for this sort of nonsense will not do for me; I must have clearness and accuracy.

I was panic-stricken at his words, and could not look at him without trembling. Indeed I believe that if I had not fixed my eye upon him, I should have been struck dumb; but when I saw his fury rising, I looked at him first, and was therefore able to reply to him. *E*

Thrasymachus, I said, with a quiver, don't be hard upon us. Polemarchus and I may have been guilty of a little mistake in the argument, but I can assure you that the error was not intentional. If we were seeking for a piece of gold, you would not imagine that we were 'knocking under to one another', and so losing our chance of finding it. And why, when we are seeking for justice, a thing more precious than many pieces of gold, do you say that we are weakly yielding to one another and not doing our utmost to get at the truth? Nay, my good friend, we are most willing and anxious to do so, but the fact is that we cannot. And if so, you people who know all things should pity us and not be angry with us.

How characteristic of Socrates! he replied, with a bitter laugh; – that's your ironical style! Did I not foresee – *337* have I not already told you, that whatever he was asked he would refuse to answer, and try irony or any other shuffle, in order that he might avoid answering?

You are a philosopher, Thrasymachus, I replied, and well know that if you ask a person what numbers make up twelve, taking care to prohibit him whom you ask from answering twice six, or three times four, or six times two, *B* or four times three, 'for this sort of nonsense will not do for me,' – then obviously, if that is your way of putting the question, no one can answer you. But suppose that he were to retort, 'Thrasymachus, what do you mean? If one of these numbers which you interdict be the true answer to the question, am I falsely to say some other number which is not the right one? – is that your meaning?' – How would you answer him? *C*

Just as if the two cases were at all alike! he said.

Why should they not be? I replied; and even if they are not, but only appear to be so to the person who is asked, ought he not to say what he thinks, whether you and I forbid him or not?

I presume then that you are going to make one of the interdicted answers?

I dare say that I may, notwithstanding the danger, if upon reflection I approve of any of them.

But what if I give you an answer about justice other and better, he said, than any of these? What do you deserve *D* to have done to you?

Done to me! – as becomes the ignorant, I must learn from the wise – that is what I deserve to have done to me.

What, and no payment! a pleasant notion!

I will pay when I have the money, I replied.

But you have, Socrates, said Glaucon: and you, Thrasymachus, need be under no anxiety about money, for we will all make a contribution for Socrates.

Yes, he replied, and then Socrates will do as he always does – refuse to answer himself, but take and pull to *E* pieces the answer of some one else.

Why, my good friend, I said, how can any one answer who knows, and says that he knows, just nothing; and who, even if he has some faint notions of his own, is told by a man of authority not to utter them? The natural thing is, that the speaker should be some one like yourself who professes to know and can tell what he knows. *338* Will you then kindly answer, for the edification of the company and of myself?

Glaucon and the rest of the company joined in my request, and Thrasymachus, as any one might see, was in
reality eager to speak; for he thought that he had an excellent answer, and would distinguish himself. But at first
B he affected to insist on my answering; at length he consented to begin. Behold, he said, the wisdom of Socrates;
he refuses to teach himself, and goes about learning of others, to whom he never even says Thank you.

That I learn of others, I replied, is quite true; but that I am ungrateful I wholly deny. Money I have none, and therefore I pay in praise, which is all I have; and how ready I am to praise any one who appears to me to speak well you will very soon find out when you answer; for I expect that you will answer well.

C Listen, then, he said; I proclaim that justice is nothing else than the interest of the stronger. And now why do you not praise me? But of course you won't.

Let me first understand you, I replied. Justice, as you say, is the interest of the stronger. What, Thrasymachus, is
the meaning of this? You cannot mean to say that because Polydamas, the pancratiast, is stronger than we are, and
finds the eating of beef conducive to his bodily strength, that to eat beef is therefore equally for our good who are
D weaker than he is, and right and just for us?

That's abominable of you, Socrates; you take the words in the sense which is most damaging to the argument.

Not at all, my good sir, I said; I am trying to understand them; and I wish that you would be a little clearer.

Well, he said, have you never heard that forms of government differ; there are tyrannies, and there are democracies, and there are aristocracies?

Yes, I know.

And the government is the ruling power in each state?

Certainly.

E And the different forms of government make laws democratical, aristocratical, tyrannical, with a view to their
several interests, and these laws, which are made by them for their own interests, are the justice which they deliver
to their subjects, and him who transgresses them they punish as a breaker of the law, and unjust. And that is what
I mean when I say that in all states there is the same principle of justice, which is the interest of the government;
339 and as the government must be supposed to have power, the only reasonable conclusion is, that everywhere there
is one principle of justice, which is the interest of the stronger.

Now I understand you, I said; and whether you are right or not I will try to discover. But let me remark, that in defining justice you have yourself used the word 'interest' which you forbade me to use. It is true, however, that in your definition the words 'of the stronger' are added.

B A small addition, you must allow, he said.

Great or small, never mind about that: we must first inquire whether what you are saying is the truth. Now we are both agreed that justice is interest of some sort, but you go on to say 'of the stronger'; about this addition I am not so sure, and must therefore consider further.

Proceed.

I will; and first tell me, Do you admit that it is just for subjects to obey their rulers?

I do.

C But are the rulers of states absolutely infallible, or are they sometimes liable to err?

To be sure, he replied, they are liable to err.

Then in making their laws they may sometimes make them rightly, and sometimes not?

True.

When they make them rightly, they make them agreeably to their interest; when they are mistaken, contrary to their interest; you admit that?

Yes.

And the laws which they make must be obeyed by their subjects, – and that is what you call justice?

Doubtless.

D Then justice, according to your argument, is not only obedience to the interest of the stronger but the reverse?

What is that you are saying? he asked.

I am only repeating what you are saying, I believe. But let us consider: Have we not admitted that the rulers may be mistaken about their own interest in what they command, and also that to obey them is justice? Has not that been admitted?

Yes.

E Then you must also have acknowledged justice not to be for the interest of the stronger, when the rulers unintentionally command things to be done which are to their own injury. For if, as you say, justice is the obedience which the subject renders to their commands, in that case, O wisest of men, is there any escape from the conclusion that the weaker are commanded to do, not what is for the interest, but what is for the injury of the stronger?

Nothing can be clearer, Socrates, said Polemarchus.

Yes, said Cleitophon, interposing, if you are allowed to be his witness. *340*

But there is no need of any witness, said Polemarchus, for Thrasymachus himself acknowledges that rulers may sometimes command what is not for their own interest, and that for subjects to obey them is justice.

Yes, Polemarchus, – Thrasymachus said that for subjects to do what was commanded by their rulers is just.

Yes, Cleitophon, but he also said that justice is the interest of the stronger, and, while admitting both these *B* propositions, he further acknowledged that the stronger may command the weaker who are his subjects to do what is not for his own interest; whence follows that justice is the injury quite as much as the interest of the stronger.

But, said Cleitophon, he meant by the interest of the stronger what the stronger thought to be his interest, – this was what the weaker had to do; and this was affirmed by him to be justice.

Those were not his words, rejoined Polemarchus.

Never mind, I replied, if he now says that they are, let us accept his statement. Tell me, Thrasymachus, I said, *C* did you mean by justice what the stronger thought to be his interest, whether really so or not?

Certainly not, he said. Do you suppose that I call him who is mistaken the stronger at the time when he is mistaken?

Yes, I said, my impression was that you did so, when you admitted that the ruler was not infallible but might be sometimes mistaken.

You argue like an informer, Socrates. Do you mean, for example, that he who is mistaken about the sick is a *D* physician in that he is mistaken? or that he who errs in arithmetic or grammar is an arithmetician or grammarian at the time when he is making the mistake, in respect of the mistake? True, we say that the physician or arithmetician or grammarian has made a mistake, but this is only a way of speaking; for the fact is that neither the grammarian nor any other person of skill ever makes a mistake in so far as he is what his name implies; they none of them err unless their skill fails them, and then they cease to be skilled artists. No artist or sage or ruler errs at the time when he is what his name implies; though he is commonly said to err, and I adopted the common *E* mode of speaking. But to be perfectly accurate, since you are such a lover of accuracy, we should say that the ruler, in so far as he is a ruler, is unerring, and, being unerring, always commands that which is for his own interest; and *341* the subject is required to execute his commands; and therefore, as I said at first and now repeat, justice is the interest of the stronger.

Indeed, Thrasymachus, and do I really appear to you to argue like an informer?

Certainly, he replied.

And do you suppose that I ask these questions with any design of injuring you in the argument?

Nay, he replied, 'suppose' is not the word – I know it; but you will be found out, and by sheer force of *B* argument you will never prevail.

I shall not make the attempt, my dear man; but to avoid any misunderstanding occurring between us in future, let me ask, in what sense do you speak of a ruler or stronger whose interest, as you were saying, he being the superior, it is just that the inferior should execute – is he a ruler in the popular or in the strict sense of the term?

In the strictest of all senses, he said. And now cheat and play the informer if you can; I ask no quarter at your hands. But you never will be able, never.

And do you imagine, I said, that I am such a madman as to try and cheat Thrasymachus? I might as well shave *C* a lion.

Why, he said, you made the attempt a minute ago, and you failed.

Enough, I said, of these civilities. It will be better that I should ask you a question: Is the physician, taken in that strict sense of which you are speaking, a healer of the sick or a maker of money? And remember that I am now speaking of the true physician.

A healer of the sick, he replied.

And the pilot – that is to say, the true pilot – is he a captain of sailors or a mere sailor?

A captain of sailors.

The circumstance that he sails in the ship is not to be taken into account; neither is he to be called a sailor; the *D* name 'pilot' by which he is distinguished has nothing to do with sailing, but is significant of his skill and of his authority over the sailors.

Very true, he said.

Now, I said, every art has an interest?

Certainly.

For which the art has to consider and provide?

Yes, that is the aim of art.

And the interest of any art is the perfection of it – this and nothing else?

E What do you mean?

I mean what I may illustrate negatively by the example of the body. Suppose you were to ask me whether the body is self-sufficing or has wants, I should reply: Certainly the body has wants; for the body may be ill and require to be cured, and has therefore interests to which the art of medicine ministers; and this is the origin and intention of medicine, as you will acknowledge. Am I not right?

342 Quite right, he replied.

But is the art of medicine or any other art faulty or deficient in any quality in the same way that the eye may be deficient in sight or the ear fail of hearing, and therefore requires another art to provide for the interests of seeing and hearing – has art in itself, I say, any similar liability to fault or defect, and does every art require another supplementary art to provide for its interests, and that another and another without end? Or have the arts to look *B* only after their own interests? Or have they no need either of themselves or of another? – having no faults or defects, they have no need to correct them, either by the exercise of their own art or of any other; they have only to consider the interest of their subject-matter. For every art remains pure and faultless while remaining true – that is to say, while perfect and unimpaired. Take the words in your precise sense, and tell me whether I am not right.

Yes, clearly.

C Then medicine does not consider the interest of medicine, but the interest of the body?

True, he said.

Nor does the art of horsemanship consider the interests of the art of horsemanship, but the interests of the horse; neither do any other arts care for themselves, for they have no needs; they care only for that which is the subject of their art?

True, he said.

But surely, Thrasymachus, the arts are the superiors and rulers of their own subjects?

To this he assented with a good deal of reluctance.

Then, I said, no science or art considers or enjoins the interest of the stronger or superior, but only the interest *D* of the subject and weaker?

He made an attempt to contest this proposition also, but finally acquiesced.

Then, I continued, no physician, in so far as he is a physician, considers his own good in what he prescribes, but the good of his patient; for the true physician is also a ruler having the human body as a subject, and is not a mere moneymaker; that has been admitted?

Yes.

And the pilot likewise, in the strict sense of the term, is a ruler of sailors and not a mere sailor?

E That has been admitted.

And such a pilot and ruler will provide and prescribe for the interest of the sailor who is under him, and not for his own or the ruler's interest?

He gave a reluctant 'Yes'.

Then, I said, Thrasymachus, there is no one in any rule who, in so far as he is a ruler, considers or enjoins what is for his own interest, but always what is for the interest of his subject or suitable to his art; to that he looks, and that alone he considers in everything which he says and does

343 When we had got to this point in the argument, and every one saw that the definition of justice had been completely upset, Thrasymachus, instead of replying to me, said: Tell me, Socrates, have you got a nurse?

Why do you ask such a question, I said, when you ought rather to be answering?

Because she leaves you to snivel, and never wipes your nose: she has not even taught you to know the shepherd from the sheep.

What makes you say that? I replied.

B Because you fancy that the shepherd or neatherd fattens or tends the sheep or oxen with a view to their own good and not to the good of himself or his master; and you further imagine that the rulers of states, if they are true rulers, never think of their subjects as sheep, and that they are not studying their own advantage day and