Plato's *Republic*

Book X

Translated by David Horan

Persons in the dialogue: Socrates, Glaucon, Adeimantus, Polemarchus, Cephalus, Thrasymachus, Cleitophon, and others

595A "Yes indeed," said I, "I have all sorts of ideas in mind as to why our city has been founded in the best possible way. I say this particularly when I reflect upon poetry."

"What aspect?" he asked.

"Our refusal to admit any poetry that employs imitation. Indeed, now that the various parts of the soul have each been distinguished, it is even more evident, **595B** in my opinion, that this should not be admitted."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, between ourselves, since you won't denounce me to the tragic poets and all the other imitators, everything of this sort seems to be a mutilation of the minds of those who hear it without possessing the antidote of knowing things as they actually are."

"What exactly do you have in mind when you say this?" he asked.

"This must be spoken," I replied, "even though the love and reverence that I have for Homer since my childhood **595C** prevents me from speaking. Indeed he seems to have been the first teacher of all the beauties that tragedy possesses, and the leader too. But no man is to be honoured before the truth, so as I say, this must be spoken."

"Yes, certainly," said he.

"Then listen, or more to the point, answer my questions."

"Just ask."

"Can you tell me, in general, what precisely imitation is? For I myself do not fully understand what it wants to be."

"And do you think I shall somehow understand it?" said he.

"That would be nothing strange," said I, "since those with poorer eyesight often see things before those whose vision **596A** is sharper."

"That is so," said he, "but in your presence, I wouldn't be at all eager to say what it is like, even if something did occur to me. So look for yourself."

“Would you like us to begin then by considering this by our familiar method? For we are presumably accustomed to proposing some one particular form, related to each of the various multiplicities to which we apply the same name. Do you understand?”

“I understand.”

“Then let’s propose this now for any of the multiplicities that you want, beds and tables for example if you like. There are, presumably, many of these.”

“Of course.”

596B “But there are, I presume, two forms related to these items, one form of bed, and one form of table.”

“Yes.”

“Aren’t we also accustomed to saying that the artificer producing either of the items is looking towards the form, and in this way he makes the beds and tables that we use, and the same applies to other items? Indeed none of the craftsmen, I presume, produces the form itself.”

“How could he?”

“Not at all, but let’s see what you call the artificer in the following case.”

596C “What artificer?”

“The one who makes everything that each particular craftsman makes.”

“You are speaking of a clever and most amazing man.”

“I’m not finished yet. You’ll soon say so all the more, for this same craftsman is not only able to make all manufactured items, but he also makes everything that springs from the earth, and he fashions all the living creatures, and everything else too, and himself, and in addition to these, earth, heaven, and gods, and he fashions everything that’s in heaven and in Hades under the earth.”

596D “You are speaking,” said he, “of an absolutely amazing sophist.”

“Don’t you believe me?” I asked. “Well tell me, do you think that an artificer like this doesn’t exist at all, or do you think that there could, in a way, be a maker of all these things, although in another way there could not? Or are you not aware that even you, yourself, would be able to make all these, in a way?”

“And what,” he asked, “is this ‘way’?”

“It’s not difficult,” said I, “this crafting is done quickly, in many ways, but it is surely quickest if you are prepared to take a mirror and carry it around wherever you go. Then you will quickly make a sun and whatever is in the sky, you will quickly make earth, **596E** quickly make yourself and the other creatures too, manufactured items, plants, and whatever else was mentioned just now.”

“Yes,” said he, “they are appearances that do not, I take it, exist in truth.”

“Excellent,” said I, “that’s just what the argument needs. For a painter, I believe, is an artificer of this sort. Is this so?”

“Of course.”

“But you will maintain, I imagine, that what he makes is not true. And yet, the painter does, in a way, make a bed, does he not?”

“Yes,” said he, “he too makes an appearance of a bed, anyway.”

597A “What about the bed maker? Didn’t we say earlier that he does not make the form, which according to us, is what bed is? He makes some particular bed.”

“Yes, so we said.”

“Now, isn’t it the case that if he does not make what it is, he would not be making what is, would he? Although something of this sort is like what is, but is not what is. So if someone were to maintain that what the work of the artificer of the bed, or of any other artificer produces, ‘is’, in the most complete sense, he is unlikely to be speaking the truth.”

“Yes,” said he, “at least that would be the opinion of those who spend their time on arguments of this sort.”

“Then we should not be at all surprised if the manufactured bed also proves to be somewhat obscure in comparison with truth.”

“Indeed not.”

597B “So,” said I, “would you like us to use these particular examples to inquire into what precisely this imitator is?”

“As you wish,” said he.

“It turns out then that there are these three beds, first is the one that is in nature, which we would maintain, I believe, was produced by god, or is there someone else?”

“No one else, in my view.”

“Then there is the one that the carpenter produced.”

“Yes,” said he.

“And the one the painter produced. Is this so?”

“So be it.”

“Then the painter, the bed-maker, and god, these three, are responsible for three forms of bed.”

“Yes, three.”

597C "Now god made only one bed itself, what bed is, either because he did not want to make more, or because some necessity was laid upon him to fashion just one bed in nature. Two or more beds of this sort were not planted by god, nor will they ever grow naturally."

"Why is that?" he asked.

"Because," said I, "if he were to make only two, another one would make its appearance, whose form both those others would possess, and that third bed, and not the other two, would be 'what bed is'."

"Correct," said he.

"So god, knowing all this, I imagine, made it one by nature, because he wanted actually to be a maker of a bed **597D** that actually is, and not a maker of some particular bed, or another mere bed-maker."

"Quite likely."

"Now do you want us to refer to him as its natural maker or something of that sort?"

"That's the right name," said he, "especially since he has made this and everything else, through nature."

"What about the carpenter? Won't we call him the artificer of a bed?"

"Yes."

"And shall we refer to the painter as an artificer and maker of this sort of thing?"

"Not at all."

"Then what shall we say he is, in relation to the bed?"

597E "I think," said he, "that it is most reasonable to refer to him as an imitator of whatever those others are artificers of."

"So be it," said I. "Are you to call the person whose product is at a third remove from nature, an imitator?"

"Yes, certainly," said he.

"So this will include the maker of tragedies if he is indeed an imitator. He is naturally at some third remove from the king and from the truth, as are all the other imitators."

"Quite likely."

598A "We have agreed then about the imitator. But tell me something about the painter. Does he attempt to imitate the thing itself, the thing in nature, in each case, or does he imitate the works of the artificers?"

"The works of the artificers," said he.

"As they are, or as they appear? You still have to make this distinction."

“How do you mean?” he asked.

“As follows. If you look at a bed from the side or from the front, or in any other way, does it differ from what it, itself, is? Or does it not differ at all even though it appears different, and does the same hold for everything else too?”

“That’s it,” said he, “it appears different but doesn’t differ at all.”

598B “Then consider this very issue. What is painting directed towards, in each case? Is it directed towards imitating what is, as it is, or towards imitating what appears, as it appears? Is it an imitation of an appearance, or of truth?”

“Of an appearance,” said he.

“So imitation is surely at a far remove from the truth, and, it seems, it can fashion everything because it gets hold of some small part of each, and this is an image. For instance, our painter, we say, will paint a cobbler for us, or a carpenter, or any other artiicer, **598C** without knowing anything about any of their skills. But nevertheless, if the painter were a good one, and he painted a carpenter and showed it from afar to children, or men devoid of intelligence, he would deceive them into thinking that it was, in truth, a carpenter.”

“Of course.”

“And in general, my friend, there is, in my view, something we should keep in mind in relation to everything of this sort. If someone ever tells us that he has met a person who is knowledgeable about craftsmanship of every sort **598D** and who knows whatever anyone else knows, with greater precision than anyone else, we should reply to someone like this that he is a simple minded fellow who has, it seems, met up with a beguiler and an imitator, and has been deceived into thinking that the man is wise beyond all measure, because he himself is unable to test knowledge, lack of knowledge, and imitation.”

“Very true,” said he.

“So, after this,” said I, “mustn‘t we consider tragic poetry and its leader, Homer, since we hear **598E** from some people that these poets know everything, all skills, all human affairs relating to excellence and vice, and indeed, all matters divine? For they say that it is necessary for the good poet to compose whilst possessed of knowledge, if he is going to compose well on whatever he is writing about, or else be unable to compose at all. We need to consider carefully then whether these people have met **599A** with imitators of this sort and have been deceived. Are they looking at the products of imitators, without being aware that these are at a third remove from what is, and are easy to make without knowing the truth, because they are producing appearances, not things that are? Or do they actually have a point? Do the good poets really have knowledge of these subjects when they impress so many people with their eloquence?”

“This certainly must be tested,” said he.

"Now do you think that if someone were able to make both the original and the image, he would devote himself seriously to crafting images and make this the primary concern of his own **599B** life, his most prized possession?"

"I do not."

"But, I imagine, if he were knowledgeable, in truth, about the objects he is imitating, he would much prefer to engage seriously with real work, rather than making imitations. He would endeavour to leave behind various beautiful works of his own as memorials, and he would be more eager to receive praise than to give praise."

"I think so," said he, "since the honour and the advantage are not equal."

"Well, we shall not demand an account from Homer or any of the other poets, on other subjects, by asking them if any of them **599C** was ever a medical expert, rather than a mere imitator of medical terminology; whether any poet, ancient or modern, is said to have made someone healthy, just as Asclepius did,[1] or what students of medicine they have left behind in the way that Asclepius left successors. Nor indeed should we ask them about any other skill. No, we should leave all that. But when it comes to the most important and sublime matters about which Homer attempts to speak, such as warfare, military **599D** strategy, the governing of cities and the education of the person, it is only right, I believe, to question him and ask, 'Dear Homer, if you are not actually at a third remove from the truth about excellence, a mere craftsman of an image, someone we defined as an imitator, but if you are indeed at a second remove, and would be able to recognise what sorts of activities make people better or worse personally and as citizens, then tell us, which cities have been better governed because of you, as Sparta was because of Lycourgos?[2] And lots of other cities too, some large, **599E** some small, were they better governed because of numerous others? What city celebrates you for being a good lawgiver, and for being of service to them? Italy and Sicily celebrate Charondas,[3] we celebrate Solon,[4] but who celebrates you?' Will he have anything to say?"

"I do not think so," said Glaucon, "at any rate, even the Homeric band[5] themselves have nothing to say on the matter."

600A "And indeed, was any war in Homer's time said to have been well conducted under the command or advice of the man himself? Does anyone remember one?"

"Not a one."

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[1] Asclepius was the god of medicine in ancient Greek mythology and religion.

[2] Lycourgus was a legendary statesman who is credited with the militaristic reform of Spartan society.

[3] Charondas was a lawgiver who lived in Catania Italy.

[4] Solon (c. 630–c. 560 BC) was an Athenian statesman and legislator who is credited with laying the foundation for the Athenian democracy. He is also mentioned at 536c.

[5] This refers to the contemporary rhapsodes who travelled around the Greek world reciting Homer's epic poems.

"Well then, what about the works of a wise man, the insights and innovations into human skills and activities in general, the sort that Thales the Milesian or Anacharsis the Scythian introduced?[6] Are there reports of this sort of thing?"

"Not at all, nothing of this sort."

"In that case, if this did not happen in the civic realm, in private was Homer himself, during his lifetime, said to have taken on a role as leader of their education, for some people? Did they then love being with him so much that they passed on a certain Homeric **600B** way of life to those who came after them? Was he, therefore, like Pythagoras who was loved for this very reason, and whose followers even now refer to their manner of life as Pythagorean, and seem somehow to stand out from everyone else?"

"No," said he, "nothing like this is reported either. Indeed, Socrates, perhaps Homer's disciple, Creophylos,[7] would prove to be more ridiculous for his education than for his name, if all that is said about Homer **600C** is true, since it is reported that Homer, even during his own lifetime, was largely ignored by this fellow."

"Yes," said I, "that is what is reported. But, Glaucon, if Homer really had been able to educate people and make them better, because he had the ability not just to imitate but to understand the matters in question, don't you think he would have produced large numbers of disciples, and been honoured and loved by them? While Protagoras of Abdera and Prodicus of Ceos,[8] and very many others, are able **600D** to convince their contemporaries in private conversations, that they will not be able to manage their own household or city unless they entrust their education to them. And in return for this wisdom, their disciples love them so much that they are just about ready to carry them around, head high. Yet, are we to say that although he really was able to help them towards excellence, the people of his own time allowed Homer, and Hesiod too, to travel about reciting poems, and did not hold them close, more closely than gold, and compel these poets to dwell with them **600E** in their homes? And if they did not persuade them, wouldn't they themselves have escorted them, wherever they went, until they had received an adequate education?"

"I think, Socrates," said he, "that what you are saying is absolutely true."

"So, should we propose that all poetic types, beginning with Homer, are imitators of images of excellence, and of anything else they write poems about, but they have no contact with the truth? Aren't they rather, as we said just now, like the painter, who without knowing anything about cobbling himself, will produce what seems to be **601A** a cobbler to those who also know nothing about this, and merely look at the colours and shapes?"

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[6] Thales of Miletus was a noted pre-Socratic philosopher and one of the Seven Sages. He was from Miletus in Ionia on the western coast of Modern-day Turkey. Anacharsis was a Scythian philosopher from Scythia, which lay to the north of the Black Sea, who travelled to Athens. None of his works survive.

[7] Creophylos was an epic poet from Samos or Chios and a contemporary of Homer. His name, which is odd, is formed from the Greek words for 'meat' and 'kind' or 'race'.

[8] Protagoras and Prodicus were influential fifth-century sophists.

“Yes, certainly.”

“In this way then, I imagine we shall maintain that the poetic type too applies certain colours to the various skills, with his words and phrases, even though he himself knows nothing except how to imitate. As a result, other people like himself who only look at the words, think he is speaking extremely well, whether he is speaking with metre, rhythm and harmony about cobbling, or about military strategy, or about anything else at all, **601B** so great is the natural enchantment that these three possess. But when these poetic productions are stripped of their musical colouration and are spoken unadorned, I think you know the show they put on, since I presume you have seen this yourself.”

“I have,” said he.

“Are they not,” said I, “like the faces of youths who are in their prime, but not beautiful when their bloom of youth is gone.”

“Absolutely,” said he.

“Come on then, consider this carefully. The maker of the image, the imitator, according to us **601C** knows nothing of what is, but does know what appears. Isn’t this so?”

“Yes.”

“Well, we shouldn’t leave this half said, we should look at it properly.”

“Speak on,” said he.

“Don’t we say that the painter paints the reins and the bit in the mouth of a horse?”

“Yes.”

“But the leatherworker and the blacksmith will make them.”

“Indeed.”

“Now does the painter know what qualities the reins or the bit should have, or is this unknown even to the smith and the leatherworker who makes them? Is it only the person who knows how to use these, the horseman, who knows what qualities they should have?”

“Very true.”

“Won’t we say that this applies in all cases?”

“How?”

601D “In each case, are there these three skills: using, making and imitating?”

“Yes.”

“Now, isn’t the excellence, beauty and correctness of each manufactured item, living creature or activity, related solely to the use for which each has been made, or naturally produced?”

“So it is.”

“So it is quite necessary that the user be most experienced with the particular item, and that he be the one who reports to the maker the good and bad qualities that it manifests when used by the user. The flautist, for example, presumably reports back **601E** to the flute maker as to which flutes serve his purpose when he plays them, and he instructs him as to how they should be made. Then the flute-maker will serve his need.”

“Of course.”

“So doesn’t one person report back, knowledgeably, about the good and bad qualities of the flutes, while the other believes him and makes them?”

“Yes.”

“So, in relation to the same item, the maker will have a correct belief about its excellence or deficiency by associating with someone who knows, and by being compelled **602A** to hear what he has to say. But it is the user who will have knowledge.”

“Certainly.”

“Now, will the imitator, from using them, have knowledge of whether or not the things he paints are good and right, or will he have right opinion because he is required to associate with the person who knows, and be instructed as to how he is to paint them?”

“Neither.”

“So the imitator will neither know, nor have right opinion, concerning what’s beautiful or bad about whatever he is imitating.”

“It seems not.”

“The poetic imitator would have a charming relationship with the wisdom of whoever he writes about.”

“Not really.”

602B “But he will proceed to imitate nevertheless, without knowing how the object in question may be good or bad. It seems rather that he will imitate the sort of thing that seems beautiful to most people, people who don’t know anything about it.”

“What else can he do?”

“Well then, it looks as if all this has been reasonably well agreed between us, the imitator knows nothing worth mentioning about the things he imitates, the imitation is a mere plaything devoid of seriousness, and those who are involved in tragic poetry, whether in iambic or epic metre, are all imitators, through and through.”

“Yes, certainly.”

602C “By Zeus,” said I, “this business of imitation is concerned with something at a third remove from the truth. Isn’t it so?”

“Yes.”

“And what aspect of the person does it have the power to influence?”

“What sort of aspect are you referring to?”

“As follows. The same magnitude seen from near and then from afar does not appear equal to us.”

“It does not.”

“And the same objects appear bent or straight when they are viewed in or out of water concave or convex objects look flat **602D** to our eyes because of the play of colours, and all such confusion is obviously itself present in us, in the soul. And shadow-drawing, taking advantage of this tendency in our nature, is nothing short of sorcery, and so too are conjuring and many other clever contrivances of this sort.”

“True.”

“Now, weren’t measuring, counting and weighing invented as intelligent safeguards against all this, so that we might not be dominated by what appears greater or less, or more or heavier, but by that which has calculated, measured, or indeed, weighed?”

“Of course.”

602E “But this function would belong to the calculating part of the soul.”

“Yes, it belongs to this part.”

“But when this part has done its measuring, and has indicated that some objects are greater than, or less than, or equal to others, the contrary qualities often present themselves, at the same time, in relation to the very same objects.”

“Yes.”

“Now didn’t we say that it is impossible for the same thing to hold contrary views about the same thing at the same time?”[9]

“And we were right to say so.”

603A “So the part of the soul that is forming opinions contrary to the measurements, would not be the same as the part that does so on the basis of the measurements.”

“No, it would not.”

“But the part that trusts in measurement and calculation would be the best part of the soul.”

“Indeed.”

“So the part that is opposed to this would be one of the lesser elements in us.”

“Necessarily.”

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[9] See 436b–c.

"Well, this is what I wanted us to agree upon when I was saying that painting and imitation generally, fashions a product **603B** that is far removed from the truth. And the part in us that it consorts with is, in turn, far removed from intelligence, and imitation is its companion and friend for no sound or true purpose."

"Entirely so," said he.

"So imitation, which is something lowly, generates lowly offspring by associating with something lowly."

"So it seems."

"Does that," said I, "apply only to imitation we can see, or does it also apply to that which we can hear, the imitation we call poetry?"

"It is likely," said he, "to apply to poetry too."

"Well," said I, "let's not put our trust only in what's likely by analogy with painting. **603C** Let's take a look, rather, at the very part of the mind with which poetic imitation consorts, and see whether it is lowly or superior."

"Yes, that's what's needed."

"Then let's propose the following. Imitation, we say, imitates human beings performing actions under compulsion or voluntarily, thinking that they have done well or done badly as a result of the activity, and experiencing pain, or being delighted in all these. Is there anything more to it than this?"

"Nothing."

"Now, is the person in **603D** a unified state of mind in all of these cases? Or is there faction, just as there was in the case of seeing, when he held opposite opinions within himself about the same objects at the same time?[10] Is it the same in the case of these activities, is there faction, and does he fight with himself? But I recall that there is no longer any need for us to agree on this issue. Indeed we agreed all of this quite adequately in the previous arguments, our souls are teeming with countless contradictions of this sort, arising at the same time."[11]

"Correct," said he.

603E "Correct, indeed," said I, "but I think we now need to recount in detail something we omitted at the time."

"What is it?" he asked.

[10] See 523a ff.

[11] See 439c ff.

"We also said earlier,[12] I believe, that when a reasonable man meets with a misfortune such as the loss of a son or something that is very important to him, he will bear this loss more easily than other people."

"Entirely so."

"But now, let's consider whether he will experience no distress or, this being impossible, he will somehow keep measure in relation to the pain."

"More the latter," said he, "that's the truth."

604A "Now tell me this about him. Do you think he will struggle more against the pain and resist it when he can be seen by his fellows, or when he is alone just by himself?"

"Presumably," said he, "he will fight it much more when he is seen by others."

"But when he is on his own, I imagine, he will dare to utter lots of things which he would be ashamed of if anyone were to hear him. He will also do lots of things which he would not allow anyone to see him doing."

"So he would," said he.

"Don't reason and law exhort him to resist, while the feeling itself draws him to the pain?"

"True."

604B "But when a contrary tendency arises in a person about the same thing, at the same time, we maintain that the person must have two elements within him."

"Of course."

"Isn't one of them ready to obey the law and follow its guidance?"

"How?"

"The law declares, I presume, that the very best course of action is to be at peace in the face of misfortunes, and not be distressed, because the good or bad of such situations is not obvious. There is no future advantage in taking things badly, nothing in human affairs **604C** deserves to be taken seriously, and being pained acts as an impediment to the very thing whose assistance we need, as quickly as possible in these cases."

"What," said he, "are you referring to?"

"To deliberation," said I, "about what has happened and to arranging one's own affairs in the way that reason deems best, as if responding to the fall of the dice, without wasting time like children who have had a fall, crying and holding on to the hurt. We should continually accustom the soul to turn as quickly as possible to the process of healing, and to ensuring that whatever has fallen or become diseased **604D** is put right, banishing lamentation by means of the healing art."

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[12] See 387d–e.

“This,” he said, “is certainly the right way for someone to deal with life’s misfortunes.”

“So, according to us, our very best part is prepared to follow this reasoning?”

“Of course.”

“But the part that leads us back towards our memories of what happened, and to our lamentations about it, and has an insatiable desire for these, is irrational and idle and a friend of cowardice. Isn’t this what we shall say?”

“We shall indeed.”

604E “Now one of these, the troubled one, is highly susceptible to imitation in all sorts of ways, while the intelligent peaceful disposition, because it is always much the same as itself, is neither easy to imitate nor, when it is imitated, is it easily understood, especially not by a large crowd of people of all sorts gathered together in a theatre. For the imitation is of an experience that is somehow alien to them.”

605A “Entirely so.”

“Then it is obvious that the imitative poet has no natural affinity with the good part of the soul, and his wisdom is not designed to please this if he is going to be well regarded among the general population. He has, rather, an affinity with the troubled and complex character because it is so easy to imitate.”

“Obviously.”

“Isn’t it only right that we set him aside at this stage and put him with the painter as his counterpart? In fact he resembles him by producing products that are inferior in terms of their truth. But he is similar to him **605B** too in appealing to that other part of the soul, rather

than to the best part. Accordingly, we would already be justified in denying him admission

into a city that is to be well regulated, because he rouses this part of the soul and nurtures it, and by making it strong he destroys the rational part. It’s as if, in the case of a city, someone were to put degenerate people in charge, entrust the city to them, and destroy the better sort. Shall we maintain that the imitative poet does the same by establishing an evil form of government privately, in the soul of each individual, gratifying the irrational part that cannot even distinguish **605C** what’s large from what’s small, and believes that the same things are now big, now little? Is he not a maker of images, images that are very far removed from the truth?”

“Entirely so.”

“But we have not yet brought our significant accusations against poetry. For its ability to do harm, even to people of the best sort, with very few exceptions, is terrible in the extreme.”

“Inevitably, if it actually does this.”

“Listen and consider. Indeed, even the best of us, I presume, have had the experience of listening to Homer, or one of the other tragic poets, imitating one of the heroes, **605D** grief

stricken, delivering a speech that stretches out into lengthy lamentations, or even singing and beating his breast. You know that we are delighted, we surrender ourselves, we follow along and feel what they feel, and, in all seriousness, we praise whoever is best able to give us such an experience and call him a good poet."

"I know, of course."

"But when some personal misfortune befalls any of us, you realise, in this case, that we pride ourselves on the opposite response, on being able to remain at peace and to endure it, since this is the response of a man, while the other, the one we just praised, **605E** is a woman's response."

"I realise this," said he.

"Now," said I, "is there anything good about this praise? When someone sees a man like this, a man he himself would be ashamed to be like and would not accept, should he be delighted and praise him rather than being filled with loathing?"

"No, by Zeus," said he, "that does not seem reasonable."

606A "Yes," said I, "especially if you were to consider it in this way."

"In what way?"

"Well, if you were to consider that the poets now satisfy and gratify the part that is restrained by force when dealing with private misfortunes, and which hungers for its proper fill of crying and lamenting and has a natural desire for these. But the best part of us, by nature, has not been sufficiently educated by reason and habit, so it relaxes its guardianship of this mournful part, **606B** since the man is looking at the suffering of other people, and he himself feels no shame if someone else claims to be good but engages in inappropriate lamentation. So he praises and pities this person, thinking there is advantage in that. It is a pleasure he will not be deprived of by despising the whole poem. Indeed, in my view, there are few who are capable of working out that whatever enjoyment we derive from the affairs of others necessarily affects our own. For having indulged pity to the full with the misfortunes of others, it is not easy to restrain it in the face of our own."

"Very true," said he.

606C "Now doesn't the same argument apply to laughter? If you are absolutely delighted when jokes you would be ashamed to make yourself are acted out on the comic stage, or heard in private, and you don't detest them for their baseness, aren't you doing exactly what we described in the case of pity? For something within you wanted to make a joke and you restrained it then, for fear of seeming like a clown. But now you are letting it loose, and having allowed it free rein, you will frequently give in to this, unwittingly, in private, and so become a comic poet yourself."

"Very much so," said he.

606D "And poetic imitation affects us in various ways in the case of sexual desires, anger, and all the appetites, pleasures and pains of the soul, which, we maintain, accompany every action

of ours. It actually nurtures these and waters them when they should be left to wither, and sets them up as rulers when they should be under authority, so that we may become better and happier rather than worse and more wretched."

"I cannot disagree," said he.

606E "In that case, Glaucon," said I, "whenever you come across Homer's eulogists declaring that this poet has educated Greece, that he deserves to be adopted and studied both for the management and for the education of human affairs, and that everyone should live his own life under the arrangements suggested by this poet, **607A** you should embrace them and love them for doing their very best, and concede that Homer is highly poetic and our foremost tragic poet. But you must understand that the only poetry we can admit into our city are hymns to the gods, and praises of good people. And if you admit the voluptuous Muse, in lyric or epic form, pleasure and pain will be kings of your city, instead of law and the reasoning that always seems best to the community."

607B "Very true," said he.

"Well," said I, "now that we have revisited the question of poetry, let this be our defence. We were, after all, acting reasonably when we banished it from our city, since this is what it is like. The argument proved this to us. But in case poetry accuses us of a certain harshness and lack of refinement, let's explain to her that a dispute between philosophy and poetry is of ancient date. Indeed there are signs of this long standing opposition in expressions such as, 'the yelping hound that bays against her master', and 'paramount in the empty talk **607C** of fools', and 'the mob that rules the over-wise', and 'the subtle thinkers who turn out to be poor', and there are scores of others. Nevertheless, let's declare that if someone is able to put forward an argument as to why there should be poetry and imitation, whose aim is pleasure, in a well-regulated city, we would gladly receive these back again, because we realise that we are still charmed by them. But it is an unholy act to betray what you think to be true. Is this so, my friend? Aren't you charmed by her **607D** too, especially when you meet her through Homer?"

"Very much so."

"Then isn't it only right that we allow her back under these circumstances, once she has defended herself in lyric or in some other metre?"

"Yes, entirely so."

"And we would, presumably, also allow her supporters who are not poetical, but who do love poetry, to make a case on her behalf, devoid of poetic metre, arguing that she is not only a source of pleasure to civic society and to human life, but a source of benefit too. And we would listen **607E** fairly, since we would surely gain an advantage if she proved to be beneficial rather than merely pleasant."

"Yes," said he, "the advantage would inevitably be ours."

"But if not, my dear friend, we must act like those who have fallen in love with someone, but forcibly restrain themselves nevertheless, because they believe that the love is not beneficial.

Because of the love of such poetry, engendered by our upbringing [608A] under our good systems of government, we shall be well disposed to a proof that she is utterly good and true. But as long as she is unable to offer a defence, we shall listen to her while chanting this argument to ourselves, the one we are stating, this charm of ours, as a precaution against falling once more into the childish love that most people have for such poetry. But we are now aware that it must not be taken seriously, as something serious that lays hold of the truth. Rather, whoever hears poetry should be careful about it, [608B] out of fear for the city within himself, and should heed whatever we have said about poetry."

"I agree entirely," said he.

"Yes, dear Glaucon," said I, "the struggle is a great one, greater than you think. What's at stake is becoming good or bad, and so we should not neglect justice, and excellence in general, because we are excited by honour, money, or any power whatsoever, or indeed by poetry."

"I agree with you," said he, "on the basis of all we have recounted, and I think [608C] anyone else would agree too."

"And yet," said I, "we have not recounted the greatest rewards of excellence, and the prizes that are on offer."

"You are referring to something great beyond measure," said he, "if it is greater than what we have spoken of."

"Could anything great happen in a short period of time?" I asked. "Indeed the entire span of time, from childhood to old age, would presumably be short in comparison with all time."

"Nothing," said he.

"Well then, do you think something immortal should take a short time span like this seriously, but not be serious about all time?"

[608D] "I think it should be serious about all time," said he, "but why are you saying this?"

"Are you not aware," said I, "that our soul is immortal and is never destroyed?"

And he looked at me, in amazement, and said, "By Zeus, I am not, but are you able to say this?"

"I can," said I, "and I think you can too. It's not difficult."

"It is for me," said he, "but as it's so easy for you, I would like to hear about it from you."

"Hear you shall," said I.

"Speak on," said he.

"Is there something you call good," I asked, "and something you call bad?"

[608E] "There is."

"Now do you think about them as I do?"

“In what way?”

“That which destroys and corrupts everything is what’s bad, while that which preserves and confers benefit is what’s good.”

“This is what I think, at any rate,” said he.

“What about this? Do you say that there is some particular good, or bad, that belongs to each individual thing, just as opthalmia [609A] belongs to the eyes, disease to the entire body, mildew to grain, rot to wood, and rust to bronze and iron? I mean, in almost all cases, do you say that there is some badness or disease that belongs to each?”

“I do,” said he.

“Isn’t it the case that whenever any of these gets attached to something, it makes whatever it is attached to degenerate, and in the end, breaks it down completely and destroys it?”

“It must be so.”

“So the bad and the degeneracy that naturally belong to each, destroys each, or if this does not destroy it, there is nothing else that could still corrupt it. [609B] For the good will never destroy anything, nor indeed will that which is neither good nor bad.”

“No, how could it?” said he.

“So if we find anything at all which has a specific badness that makes it worse but is unable to dissolve and destroy it, won’t we know, at this stage, that no destruction belongs to something of such a nature?”

“Quite likely,” said he.

“Well then,” said I, “does soul have something particular that makes it bad?”

“Very much so,” said he, “everything we were listing just now, injustice, lack of restraint, cowardice and ignorance.”

[609C] “Now do any of these dissolve and destroy the soul? And consider carefully in case we are misled into thinking that the unjust and unreasonable person, when caught in his unjust act, is destroyed by that very injustice, even though it is a degeneracy of the soul. Think of it, rather, in the following way. Just as disease, the vice of the body, wastes it away, dissolves it, and brings it to a stage where it is no longer a body, so too, in all the cases we just mentioned, when their own particular [609D] badness attaches itself to them or is present in them, they are corrupted by this and eventually cease to exist. Isn’t this so?”

“Yes.”

“Come on then and consider soul in the same manner. Do injustice and vice in general, when present in the soul, corrupt and waste it away by their presence, and by attaching to it until they bring the soul to death and separate it from the body.”

“No,” said he, “this does not happen at all.”

“But it is also unreasonable,” said I, “that something could be destroyed by the degeneracy of another, but not by its own.”

“Unreasonable.”

609E “Yes, Glaucon,” said I, “think about it. We do not think that a body could be destroyed by the degeneracy that belongs to foods themselves, be it staleness, rottenness or anything else. But once the degeneracy of the foods themselves produces a poor condition of the body, in the body, we shall maintain that because of the foods it has been destroyed by its own badness, namely, disease. But since the foods are **610A** one thing and the body is another, we should never expect the body to be corrupted by their alien badness, unless their degeneracy produces its own degeneracy in the body.”

“Quite right,” said he.

“Well, by the same argument,” said I, “unless degeneracy of the body produces degeneracy of soul, in the soul, we would not expect soul to be destroyed by the alien badness of the body, a badness that belongs to something else, in the absence of soul’s own particular degeneracy.”

“Indeed,” said he, “that is reasonable.”

“Well we should either refute these assertions because we were wrong or, as long as they stand unrefuted, **610B** we should not declare that the soul is ever destroyed in any sense by fever, or any other disease, by slaughter, or even if someone chops the body up into tiny pieces, until someone proves that soul itself becomes more unjust, or more unholy because these things happen to the body. We should not allow **610C** anyone to maintain that soul or anything else is destroyed when an alien badness arises in it, in the absence of its own particular badness.”

“But you may be sure,” said he, “that no one will ever prove that the souls of those who are dying become more unjust because of death.”

“But,” said I, “suppose someone is bold enough to attack this argument so that he will not be forced to accept that souls are immortal. If he says that the dying person does become more degenerate and more unjust, we shall, presumably, maintain that if this is true, then injustice is fatal to its possessor, just as fatal as disease. **610D** So by its own nature, it would kill those who catch it, killing those who have more of it quite quickly, and those who have less of it, more gradually. This would be unlike the present situation where the unjust die because of their injustice, but at the hands of others who are imposing a penalty upon them.”

“By Zeus,” said he, “if injustice is going to be fatal to its possessor, it will turn out not to be so terrible after all, for it would be a release from evils. But I think it is more likely to turn out to be the exact opposite. It kills others, **610E** if that is actually possible, while making its possessor more lively, and in addition to being more lively, more awake too. And so, in my view, it seems nowhere near to being fatal.”

“You are right,” said I. “In fact, when its own particular degeneracy and its own particular badness is not sufficient to kill or destroy soul, then badness assigned to the destruction of

something else will hardly destroy soul, or anything else for that matter, except that which it is assigned to destroy."

"Hardly likely, indeed," said he.

"In that case, since it is not destroyed by any badness, either its own or an alien one, [611A] it obviously must be something that always is, and since it always is, mustn't it be immortal?"

"It must," said he.

"Well," said I, "this is how matters stand, and since this is so, you may note that the souls must always be the same. For their number could not become less, I presume, since none are destroyed, nor could there be more of them, since you know that any increase in number among any immortal things would come from the mortal, and everything would, in the end, be immortal."

"True."

"But," said I, "let us not think that this is so, for the argument will not allow [611B] it. Nor again, should we think that soul, in its truest nature, is the sort of thing that is itself full of variation, dissimilarity and divergence, with respect to itself."

"How do you mean?" he asked.

"It is not easy," said I, "for something to be everlasting when it is composed of many things and they have not been put together in the best possible way, which is how the soul appeared to us just now."

"No, that is not likely to be easy."

"Well, although our earlier argument, and others, would compel us to accept that soul is immortal, we should still behold what it is like in truth, not mutilated by its association with the body and other bad influences, [611C] which is how we behold it now. We should, rather, use reason to see it properly, as it is when it has been purified, and we shall find that it is much more beautiful, and we shall discern justice and injustice with greater clarity, and everything else we have just described. We have now spoken the truth about it, as it appears at the moment. But although we behold it in this condition, we are like people looking at the sea-god, Glaucus, who are still unable, easily, to see his ancient nature, [611D] because the original parts of his body have been broken off, smashed and mutilated by the waves. And other things have attached themselves to him, such as shells and seaweed and rocks, so that he seems more like some wild animal, rather than what he is by nature. That's also how we behold the soul, in a condition that results from countless bad influences. But, dear Glaucon, we should look elsewhere."

"Where?" said he.

"We should look to soul's love of wisdom, and consider what it is in contact with, and the sort of thing it strives [611E] to associate with, because it is akin to the divine, the immortal, and what always is. We should consider what it would become like by directing itself entirely to this sort of thing, when it has lifted itself by this effort out of the sea that it now resides in,

and has knocked off the stones and shells that now encrust it, **612A** since it is feasting on earth, and is surrounded by a wild profusion of earth and stone, because of the feasting that is generally called happiness. Then one would see soul's true nature, what it is like, and how it is so, and whether its form is multiple or just one. But we have now described what happens to it and the forms it takes in human life, in what I regard as a satisfactory manner."

"Entirely so," said he.

"In that case," said I, "did we not do away with the other criticisms in the course of our argument, without praising the rewards and good reputation that are associated with justice, as you say Hesiod **612B** and Homer do?[13] Have we not found that justice itself is best for soul itself, and that soul should perform just actions whether it possesses the ring of Gyges or not, and the helmet of Hades too, in addition to that famous ring?"[14]

"Very true," said he.

"Well then, Glaucon," said I, "at this stage there should, in addition, be no reluctance about restoring to justice and to excellence **612C** in general, any rewards of any kind that they afford to the soul, either from humanity or from the gods, during a person's life or after he dies."

"Absolutely," said he.

"In that case, will you restore to me what you borrowed in the argument?"

"What precisely?"

"I conceded to you that the just man might be reputed unjust, and the unjust man might be reputed just. You made this request, and even if these cannot go unnoticed by gods and mankind, the concession had to be made nevertheless for the sake of the argument, **612D** so that justice itself might be judged alongside injustice itself. Don't you remember?"

"It would be an injustice on my part," said he, "if I did not."

"Well," said I, "now that they have been judged, I demand, on behalf of justice, that you restore her good reputation among gods and men, and that we too should concur that she is held in such high repute, so that justice may carry off the victory prizes that come from being reputed to possess justice, prizes she bestows upon those who possess her in truth. Indeed justice has already proved that she bestows the goods that come from actually being just, and is not deceiving those who really do attain to her."

612E "A just demand," said he.

"Would you concede, firstly," said I, "that the gods certainly are not unaware of what these two, justice and injustice, are like?"

"We shall concede that," said he.

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[13] See 358a–367e.

[14] For the ring of Gyges, see 359d–360a. The helmet of Hades was also thought to confer invisibility upon its wearer.

“But if there is awareness of both, then one would be loved by the gods, and the other hated by the gods, as we agreed at the outset.”

“Quite so.”

“And won’t we agree that for the person who is loved by the gods, whatever comes **613A** from the gods, at any rate, is all for the best, unless some unavoidable badness accrues to him from a former transgression?”

“Certainly.”

“So in the case of the just man, we may presume that whether poverty or disease or one of the so-called evils befalls him, these will end in some good for this man during his lifetime or after his death. For the gods certainly will never neglect someone who has an eager desire to become just, and to become **613B** as much like unto god as a human being possibly can by pursuing excellence.”

“Yes,” said he, “a person like this is hardly likely to be neglected by his like.”

“And shouldn’t we presume that the exact opposite of all this applies to the unjust person?”

“Very much so.”

“These then would be the sorts of prizes the gods give to the just man.”

“Well that is what I think anyway,” said he.

“But what prizes,” said I, “does he receive from mankind? If we are to describe the situation as it is, isn’t it somewhat as follows. Don’t the clever but unjust people behave like runners who run well when going up the track, but not in the other direction? At first **613C** they sprint away at a brisk pace, but in the end they become laughing stocks as they run off the track without the victory wreath, with their ears drooping down to their shoulders. But the true runners keep going to the very end, collect their prizes, and are crowned as victors. Isn’t this also how things turn out, for the most part, in the case of just people? Towards the end of each undertaking, or association, or their entire life, are they not well regarded, and don’t they carry off the prizes that their fellow men bestow?”

“Yes, indeed.”

“So will you put up with it if I say the same things about these people as you said **613D** about unjust people? For I shall say that when the just people get older, they take up positions of authority in their own city, if they wish, they marry from whatever families they wish, and marry their children into any families they please. In fact, I am now saying about these people everything you then said about those people. And furthermore I shall say that the unjust, in most cases, even if they go undetected when young, are caught at the end of their course and become figures of fun. In old age they are trampled upon like wretches by strangers and by their own people, they are whipped and they suffer everything you rightly **613E** described as brutal. I won’t repeat the details, so just assume that you have heard me list them and tell me if you will put up with my saying this.”

"Yes indeed," said he, "it's only right that you say so."

"These then," said I, "would be the sorts of prizes, rewards and gifts that the just person receives from gods and his fellow men **614A** during his own lifetime, in addition to those goods that justice herself bestows."

"Noble and secure rewards indeed," said he.

"Well, they are nothing," said I, "in number or extent, in comparison with those that await the just and the unjust after death. These should now be heard so that each of them may hear in full what they deserve to hear from the argument."

614B "Speak on," said he, "as there are not many things I'd be more pleased to listen to."

"I shan't," said I, "tell you the long tale that Alcinous told,[15] but a story of a brave man, Er, the son of Armenius, a Pamphylian by race. Once upon a time, he met his death on the battlefield, and when the corpses were being gathered after ten days, already decomposing, his body was found in good condition. He was brought home, and on the twelfth day as the funeral was about to begin, and he was lying on the pyre, he revived, and having come back to life, he described what he had seen there, in that other place.

"He said that when his soul went forth, it proceeded along with many **614C** others and they arrived at a mysterious region in which there were two openings in the earth, side by side, and two others in the heaven above, directly opposite them. Judges were seated between these, and once they had passed judgement they ordered the just to proceed upwards to the right, through the heaven, with signs attached in front of them indicating the judgements that had been passed, while they ordered the unjust to proceed downwards to the left, also wearing signs behind them, indicating all they had **614D** done. But when he himself came forward, they told him that he must be a messenger to humanity to tell of what went on there, and they directed him to listen and to observe everything in the place.

"He said that he saw souls there, departing through one opening in the heaven, and one in the earth, after judgement had been passed upon them. Through the other two openings souls came up out of the earth, in one case, full of squalor and filth, while from the other opening other souls descended from the heaven, **614E** purified. They arrived continually, looking as if they had completed a lengthy journey, and they made their way gladly to the meadow and encamped there, as if at a religious festival. Those who recognised one another embraced, and those who had come out of the earth enquired from the others about what went on there in the other place, while those who had come from the heaven asked about what went on below. They swapped stories with one another, one group wailing and lamenting **615A** as they recalled whatever they had suffered and seen, and what it was like on their journey beneath the earth, which was a journey of a thousand years. While those who had come from the heaven, for their part, described pleasant experiences, and scenes beautiful beyond measure.

"To recount the many details, Glaucon, would take a long time, but the summation," he said, "was as follows. However many wrongs the person had done, to however many people, he

[15] This is a reference to books ix–xi of Homer's *Odyssey*, which was referred to as the 'tales of Alcinous'.

paid a just penalty for them all, in turn, a tenfold penalty for each, that is, a period of one hundred years in each case, which is the span of a human life, so that the penalty paid would be ten times **615B** the unjust act. For instance, if someone had been responsible for many deaths by betraying entire cities or armies, and reducing them to slavery, or had been responsible for some other enormity besides, they would receive back the pain of all these multiplied tenfold for each. Then again, if someone had done good deeds and had become just and holy, they would receive their deserved reward on the same basis. And he also made comments, not worth recalling, about those who died as soon as they were born or lived for but a short time. **615C** And he described even greater penalties in cases of disrespect and respect for gods and for parents and slaying with one's own hand.

"Now," he said, "that he was present when one person asked another where Ardiaeus the Great is? This Ardiaeus had been tyrant of some city in Pamphylia, a thousand years before then, and he had murdered his aged father and his elder **615D** brother and was said to have done many other unholy deeds too. Er said that the person who was questioned replied, 'He has not come here', said he, 'nor will he ever come here. In fact this was one of the terrible scenes that we beheld. When we were close to the mouth of the chasm and about to come out after all that we had been through, we suddenly caught sight of him and others too, most of them, surely tyrants, but there were also some private citizens who had committed great **615E** crimes. Just when they thought they were going to go up, the mouth of the chasm did not let them, but it gave a roar whenever someone in such an incurable condition of degeneracy, or someone who had not paid the penalty in full, tried to come up. Then,' said he, 'wild men of fiery aspect who had been standing by recognised the sound, took hold of some of them and led them away. But they bound Ardiaeus and others, hand, **616A** foot and head, flung them down and flayed them, dragged them to the side of the road to strip their skin on thorns, indicating to those who kept passing by why they were taking them away, and that they were about to throw them into Tartarus.'[16] Then, although they had already met with many terrors of all sorts, the man said that this exceeded them all, the fear that this voice might emerge, in their case, when they went up. And each went through with great delight, as the voice was silent.

"Such were the just penalties and punishments that Er described, and the blessings **616B** were the counterparts of these. But once seven days had elapsed for each group in the meadow, they had to get up on the eighth day and go on a journey from there. In four days they arrived at a place where they beheld a light extending straight from above, through all heaven and earth, like a pillar bearing a strong resemblance to a rainbow, but brighter and purer. This they arrived at after a further day's travel, and there, at the light's centre, **616C** they saw the extremities of its bonds extending from the heaven, for this light is what binds the heaven together, like the braces under a trireme, holding the entire revolution of the heaven together in this way. The spindle of Necessity, by which all the heavenly revolutions are turned was extending from the extremities. Its shaft and its hook were made of adamant and its whorl from a mixture of this and of other materials.

[16] Tartarus is the abyss in which the wicked are tormented in Greek mythology.

616D "The nature of the whorl was as follows. Although its shape was like what we have here, you should recognise what it was like from what he said. It was as if one large whorl, hollow and scooped out thoroughly, had another one just like it, but smaller, fitting neatly inside it, like jars that fit inside one another, and a third and a fourth, and four others. In fact there were eight whorls altogether, lying 616E inside one another, and their rims looked like circles when viewed from above. From the back, these formed the uniform surface of a single whorl, centred on the shaft which had been driven right through the centre of the eighth whorl.

"The first and outermost whorl had the widest circular rim, the rim of the sixth was second, that of the fourth was third, that of the eighth was fourth, that of the seventh was fifth, that of the fifth was sixth, that of the third was seventh, while that of the second was eighth. The rim of the largest whorl was spangled, that of the seventh was brightest, while the rim of the eighth derived its colour from the seventh which shone upon it. 617A The colours of the second and fifth were quite similar to one another and yellower than the previous two, the third had the whitest colour, the fourth was reddish while the sixth was the second whitest.

"Although the whole spindle revolved, turning with the same motion within the overall revolution, the seven inner circles revolved gently in the opposite direction to the overall revolution. Of these inner circles, the eighth travelled fastest, 617B second fastest in pace with one another, were the seventh, sixth and fifth. The fourth moved third fastest and it seemed to them to be revolving backwards. The third was fourth fastest, and the second was fifth. The spindle turned in the lap of Necessity and perched on top of each of the circles was a Siren, revolving along with the circle, sending forth a single sound on a single note, and from them all, all eight, came a single concordant harmony. There were three other women roundabout, at an equal distance from one another, each seated 617C upon a throne. These were the Fates, Lachesis, Clotho and Atropos, the daughters of Necessity, dressed in white with garlands upon their heads, singing in harmony with the Sirens. Lachesis sang of what had come to pass, Clotho of things that are, Atropos of what is to come. Clotho, with a touch of her right hand, was helping turn the outer revolution of the spindle, pausing from time to time, while Atropos, with her left hand, did the same for the inner revolutions, and Lachesis 617D lent a hand to each revolution in turn, with each hand in turn.

"Now, once they had arrived, they had to go immediately to Lachesis where a prophet first divided them into ranks, then took tokens and patterns of lives from the lap of Lachesis, ascended a lofty platform and proclaimed, 'This is the word of Lachesis, maiden daughter of Necessity. Souls that live for a day, now begins another death-bearing 617E cycle for your mortal race. No daimon shall be assigned to you by lot, but you shall choose your daimon. Let the one who is allotted first place be the first to choose a life which he will, necessarily, abide by. Excellence has no master but each will have more of her or less of her, as he honours her or dishonours her. The responsibility lies with the one who chooses – god is not responsible.'

"Having said all this, he threw down the lots among them all and each picked up the one that fell beside him, except for Er who was forbidden to do so, and the number that each had drawn was obvious to the person who had picked it. 618A After this he proceeded to place the patterns of lives on the ground in front of them, and there were many more of these than the

number of people present. There were lives of every variety, for lives of all living creatures, and indeed all human lives, were included. There were tyrannies among them, some that endure to the end, others that are destroyed in the middle of their course, ending in poverty, exile or beggary. There were lives of famous men, some famous for their appearance and beauty and for their general **618B** strength and prowess, some for their lineage and the excellence of their ancestors, while others were infamous for the same reasons. The same applied to women too. But because of the requirement that a soul become a different kind of soul by choosing a different life, the arrangement of soul was not inherent. But everything was commingled with everything else, and with wealth, poverty, disease and health, and anything in between.

"And this, dear Glaucon, it seems is the moment of extreme danger for a human being, and because of this we must neglect all other studies save one. We must pay the utmost attention to how each of us **618C** will be a seeker and student who learns and finds out, from anywhere he can, who it is who will make him capable and knowledgeable enough to choose the best possible life, always and everywhere, by distinguishing between a good life and a degenerate one. Who will make him knowledgeable enough to know what bad **618D** or good will be brought about by beauty when it is combined with poverty or prosperity, along with what sort of disposition of soul, doing so by taking account of everything we have mentioned and how their combinations with one another, and separations from one another, contribute to the excellence of a life? Who will make him knowledgeable enough to know what is brought about by the various inter-combinations with one another of good or evil birth, private station or public office, strength or weakness, ease of learning or difficulty in learning, and everything else like this that belongs naturally to the soul, or is acquired? He will do all this so that he is able to make his choice reasonably, between the worse **618E** life and the better one, by looking to the nature of the soul, and calling the life that leads soul to become more unjust, the worse life, and the one that leads it to become more just, the better life. All other studies he will set aside, for we have seen that in life and after death this is the supreme choice. **619A**

"He must go then to Hades holding to this view with an unbreakable resolve, so that even there he would not be dazzled by wealth and other such bad influences, fall in with tyrannies and activities like that, inflict a whole host of incurable evils, and experience even greater evils himself. He would decide rather that he should always choose the life that is midway between such extremes, and flee the excesses from either direction as best he can in this life and in all that is to come, **619B** for that is how a human being attains the utmost happiness. And indeed the messenger from there reported that the prophet then said, 'Even for the person who comes up last, but chooses intelligently and lives in a disciplined way, an acceptable life rather than a bad one, awaits. The first to choose must not be careless, and the last must not be despondent.'

"He said that once the prophet had made this announcement, the person who had been allotted first place came up immediately and chose the most extreme tyranny. Out of stupidity and greed, **619C** he had made his choice without considering all the details properly, so he did not notice that it involved being destined to devour his own children, and other evils. Once he

had time to look at it, he beat his breast and lamented his choice, without being true to the earlier pronouncements of the prophet. For he did not blame himself for the evils, but chance and the spirits and everything else except himself. He was one of the people who had come from the heaven and had lived his previous life under an orderly system of government, where any share **619D** of excellence he had came from habit in the absence of philosophy. And, generally speaking, those who had come from the heaven were more likely to be caught out in this way, since they had no training in dealing with suffering, while those who had come out of the earth, for the most part, having had experience of suffering themselves, and having seen others suffer, did not make their choices in a hurry. This, and the element of chance from the lot, is why most souls undergo an interchange of what is good and what is bad. Yet if someone were to engage in philosophy, consistently, in a sound manner, whenever he comes back to live in this world, **619E** unless he is among the last to choose, it is likely not only that he would be happy whilst here, but also that his journey from here to there, and back here again, would be a smooth journey through the heaven, rather than rough and underground. So say the pronouncements from the other realm.

"Indeed, he said that the scene as the souls **620A** each chose their lives was well worth beholding, for it was a pitiful, comical and amazing sight to see. In fact, most of them made their choice based upon the habits of the previous life. And so he saw the soul that had once been Orpheus[17] choosing the life of a swan out of hatred for womankind because, having met his death at their hands, the soul was unwilling to be conceived and born of woman. He saw that Thamyris'[18] soul had chosen the life of a nightingale, and he saw a swan changing its choice to the life of a human, and other musical animals acted in like manner. **620B** The soul that had been allotted twentieth place chose the life of a lion. This was the soul of Ajax,[19] son of Telamon, and it was fleeing from embodiment as a human, because it remembered the decision over the armour of Achilles. Next came Agamemnon's[20] soul. This soul too was hostile to the human race because of its past experiences, and so it changed to the life of an eagle. The soul of Atalanta[21] had been allotted a place in the middle, and when it saw the huge honours that accompany the life of a male athlete, it could not pass this by, and so it grabbed that life. After this, Er saw **620C** the soul of Epeius[22] the son of Panopeus, adopting the nature of a highly skilled woman. In the distance among the last to choose, he saw the

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17 Orpheus was a legendary bard, musician and prophet. He was supposedly killed by a group of Maenads, female followers of Dionysus, for not honouring the god.

18 Thamyris was a legendary Thracian musician who boasted that he could beat the muses in a competition. When he lost they blinded him and took away his ability to compose poetry.

19 Ajax was a Homeric hero who was depicted in the *Iliad* as second only to Achilles in courage. After the death of Achilles, Ajax and Odysseus competed against one another for Achilles' armour. Ajax lost the competition and took his own life.

20 Agamemnon was the king of Mycenae. He led the army against Troy after Helen, the wife of his brother Menelaus, was taken there by Paris.

21 Atalanta was a huntress in Greek mythology. It had been prophesied that marriage would be her undoing, so when her father attempted to arrange a marriage for her she stipulated that she would only marry one who could defeat her in a footrace, and those suitors whom she defeated would be killed. Eventually Hippomens was able to best Atalanta by tempting her with three golden apples that had been provided by Aphrodite who felt spurned by Atalanta's rejection of love.

22 Epeius was a soldier in the Trojan War. He was credited with building the Trojan Horse with the help of Athena, and was one of the warriors who hid inside it and stormed the city. See *Odyssey* viii.493.

soul of Thersites,[23] the joker, entering into a monkey. As it happened, the soul of Odysseus[24] was allotted the last choice of all. When his turn came, he remembered all his former troubles, gave up the love of honour he had held previously, and went about for a long time seeking the life of an ordinary man with a private station. And he found it with difficulty, lying about somewhere, neglected by everyone else. And he said, **620D** when he saw it, that he would have done the same thing even had he been given first choice, and he chose it gladly. And similarly, the other beasts entered into human beings, or into one another, the unjust changed into wild creatures while the just changed into tame ones, and there were mixtures of all sorts.

"Now, once all of the souls had chosen their lives, they went up to Lachesis in the allotted order, and she sent them on their way, with the daimon that each had chosen as the guardian of the life, **620E** who fulfils what has been chosen. The guardian first led the soul to Clotho to ratify the fate it had chosen, as allotted beneath her hand as she turned the revolving spindle. Once the fate had been confirmed, the guide led it on again to Atropos and her spinning, to make the web of destiny unalterable. From there it went, inexorably, beneath the throne of Necessity, **621A** and when it had gone through, since the others had also gone through, they all proceeded to the Plain of Forgetfulness through terrible burning, stifling heat, for the place is devoid of trees or anything that springs from the earth. Evening was coming on by then, so they encamped beside the River of Heedlessness whose water no vessel can contain. Now it was necessary for all of them to drink a measure of the water, but some, who were not protected by wisdom, drank more than the measure, and as he drank, **621B** each forgot everything.

"When they had fallen asleep, at midnight there was thunder and an earthquake, and each was suddenly borne upwards, this way and that, to their birth, like shooting stars. He himself had been prevented from drinking the water, yet he did not know by what manner or means he arrived back in the body, but he suddenly looked about and saw himself already lying on the funeral pyre at dawn.

"And that, dear Glaucon, is how the story was saved and not lost, and it may save us too **621C** if we heed its advice, and we shall safely cross over the River of Forgetfulness without defiling our soul. But if we are persuaded by me, we shall regard the soul as immortal and capable of bearing everything bad, and everything good too, and we shall hold always to the upward path, practising justice accompanied by wisdom in every way possible, so that we may be friends to ourselves and to the gods, both during our stay here, and when we receive the rewards of **621D** justice, carrying them off like prize winners in the games, and both here and in the journey of a thousand years that we have described, all may be well with us."

End Book X

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[23] Thersites was an unremarkable soldier in the Achaean army during the Trojan War. In *Iliad* ii.211–277 he is depicted interrupting and berating Agamemnon as he is rallying the troops. In response Odysseus beats and reukes Thersites for his insolence.

[24] Odysseus was the king of Ithaca. He was a leading warrior for the Achaeans in the Trojan War. His ten-year journey back to Ithaca from Troy is recounted in Homer's *Odyssey*.