3-21-1985

Plato's Refutation of Thrasymachus: The Craft Argument

Edward Warren
San Diego State University, ewarr1@msn.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://orb.binghamton.edu/sagp

Part of the Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity Commons, Ancient Philosophy Commons, and the History of Philosophy Commons

Recommended Citation
https://orb.binghamton.edu/sagp/124

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). It has been accepted for inclusion in The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter by an authorized administrator of The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). For more information, please contact ORB@binghamton.edu.
Plato's Refutation of Thrasymachus:

The Craft Argument
Edward Warren
San Diego State University

The argument in Republic Book One involves Socrates and three successive speakers, Cephalus, Polemarchus, and Thrasymachus; and as the discussion passes from one speaker to the next the argument becomes more serious. The most important part of Book One concerns the debate with Thrasymachus, and it is this discussion that I wish to examine. Thrasymachus gives what appears to be a brief, succinct definition of justice, which is usually rendered something like "Justice is the interest of the stronger," but which could be understood to mean "Justice is what profits the better." It is not clear what he thinks is profitable nor who or what the 'better' is. It soon appears that his view was developed from observing the behavior of human communities, so that he regards justice as the advantage of the established government, namely, of that group that has power and rules in every city. Laws are made to the advantage of the better people, the stronger or the ruling group. 8 Thrasymachus soon agrees, however, that should the rulers err, a just citizen, in obeying the law, would act contrary to the advantage of the ruler and so be unjust. Thrasymachus' view is clarified when he develops his position from a straightforward empirical claim about the way governments function to a more theoretical view which asserts that the ruler, 9 in so far as he practices the skill of ruling and so knows what he is doing, never makes a mistake. 10 Thrasymachus accepts the notion that a man, in so far as he knows, makes no errors. Knowledge confers infallibility. A just citizen, then, in a community ruled by a knowing ruler would never act contrary to the advantage of the government. Should an error be made, the ruler has failed in his skill and no longer is a 'true' ruler. There now emerges the ideal ruler or
Although Thrasymachus appears to be refuted in the argument based on craft analogies, which will be discussed in Section III, he ignores Socrates' argument and returns once again to push his position, and what emerges is the definition that underlies his argument but was stated inadequately earlier: justice is always what is profitable to someone else, the good of another, δ κρείττων, while injustice is one's own, private good, provided you have the strength to get it. The ideal κρείττων is supremely unjust because he achieves his own advantage and profit. The ruler always seeks his own advantage and ends up with more than anyone else. Πλεονεξία is the mark of the Thrasymachan hero, and its most complete form lies in the despot who can practice injustice on a great scale and who does not fear reprisal. The just are so because they are weaker. In this version of his theory Thrasymachus is anticipating the view expressed by Glaucon:

επ' αὐτοκράτῳ οὖν λάβομεν ἀν τὸν δίκαιον τῷ ἄθλῳ εἰς ταύταν ἴνα διὰ τὴν πλεονεξίαν ὁ πάσα φύσις διόκειν πέρυκιν ὡς οὖσαν, νομίζει δὲ βίᾳ παράγεται ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ τόσου τιμήν. 3

Socrates' response is finally to shift the argument away from political and civil life to the issue of whether the life of the just or unjust man is stronger or better, κρείττω (347e). After all, the despot is an individual, and his way of life is preferred by Thrasymachus and is the ideal for all humans to aspire to. Socrates becomes concerned that Thrasymachus is making a more dangerous claim than first appeared. "What appears to me of greater importance is what Thrasymachus is saying now, namely that the life of the unjust man is to be preferred to that of the just." A direct consideration of the definition of justice is set aside in favor of considering these consequences of being just or unjust. Socrates and Thrasymachus then pass on to considering which of the two lives, those of justice and injustice, involves wisdom, strength, and happiness. Socrates presents these three
brief arguments of varying merit, the last of which is so short and undeveloped that a first-time reader easily gets lost.

Thrasymachus' position begins with a view about the de facto condition of human societies, then develops to include a more theoretical notion of the ruler as the practitioner of an art or skill of ruling. After a setback he returns partially to his former de facto position buttressing his claims by his comparison of rulers and shepherds and by examples of unjust men getting more than just men and so being better off. In its final form his argument, I believe, also includes a claim about human nature, that it is rooted in a desire to get more, even though that claim is not worked out. Thrasymachus believes that the behavior of human societies makes sense once one realizes that everyone individually and collectively wants to get as much as he can to satisfy his wants.

The only refutation of Thrasymachus' position that justice is the interest of the stronger occurs in that stage of the argument concerning the infallible ruler and rests on the craft analogy. The later and more profound definition that justice is the advantage of another is not explicitly analyzed in Book One but reappears in Book Two and forms the counter-position to the one Socrates' sets out to defend at the urging of Adeimantus:

Follow Glaucon's advice and do not take reputations into account, for if you do not deprive them of true reputation and attach false reputations to them, we shall say that you are not praising justice but the reputation for it, or blaming injustice but the appearance of it, that you are encouraging one to be unjust in secret, and that you agree with Thrasymachus that the unjust is another's good, the advantage of the stronger, while the unjust is one's own advantage and profit, though not the advantage of the weaker. 367b5-c5

The remainder of the Republic is a reply to Thrasymachus' final statement (343bl-344c8) and its development by Glaucon and Adeimantus.
I propose to argue that the craft argument is not an analogy at all but is connected to a set of deeper convictions which Plato held when he wrote the Republic and which, to some extent, appear later in that work. The discussion is at a level of discourse designed to evoke as much agreement as Plato can get from a difficult opponent who, as I believe Socrates realizes, does not share some of Socrates' basic views of the world. The arguments are not chosen simply to try to persuade Thrasymachus but have been selected for their value in leading a learner to see what Plato believes to be true, not only about justice but also about man and the cosmos he lives in.

The only detailed attempt at refuting Thrasymachus' definition of justice, as I have already noted, rests on the craft argument, and that argument concerns the nature of knowledge and its power. I shall argue that in Plato's view the nature and existence of knowledge refutes Thrasymachus and that in employing the craft argument to this end Plato presupposes that 1) knowledge is always of Form, 2) knowledge, being, and power are united, and 3) the Good confers value upon being. These Platonic views will emerge in Section II, where I shall discuss two forms of the craft argument in the conversation with Polemarchus; in Section III, where Socrates attempts his principal refutation of Thrasymachus' notion of the ideally unjust ruler; in Section IV, where πλεονεξία is a mark of ignorance in the craftsman and cannot be a characteristic of wisdom; and in Section V, where I shall attempt to summarize my interpretations.
II. The Preliminary Argument with Polemarchus

That justice can be considered the result of a craft knowledge is first introduced in the Republic at 332d1-2 where Polemarchus is prepared to accept Socrates' unraveling of Simonides' "to return what is owed is just" (τὸ τὰ ὁφειλόμενα δίκαιον εἶναι ἀποδίδοναι, 332a7-8) as "this (is) just, to give to each man what is proper to him, and he called this what is due" (τούτ' είη δίκαιον, τὸ προσήκον ἐκάστῳ ἀποδίδοναι, τούτο δὲ ὁνόμασεν ὁφειλόμενον, 332c2-3). Polemarchus shortly clarifies the notions of τροσηκον and οφειλόμενον by giving the well-known definition "that it is that (craft) which benefits one's friends and harms one's enemies" (ἡ τοῖς φίλοις τε καὶ ἐχθροῖς ὄφελίας τε καὶ βλάβας ἀποδίδοναι (τέχνη), 332d5-6).

Socrates shows Polemarchus that crafts are useful in various ways, medicine in dealing with health and disease and farming in acquiring crops. So, what is justice useful for, or what can one acquire with it? If justice is a craft, then like other crafts it must be useful. Throughout the attempt to clarify 'helping one's friends and harming one's enemies' Polemarchus' unspoken conviction seems to be that justice is a kind of trustworthiness, a character-trait which is clearly valuable in fighting wars and in engaging in business. Polemarchus does not note the need for trustworthiness in the physician, the farmer, and so on because he is unclear about the issues raised by Socrates and probably has never been pushed to the kinds of reflection that Socrates wants him to engage in. Consequently, when he thinks of justice as a craft, and primarily as a trustworthiness in money-matters which involves some kind of expertise and knowing, he easily accepts the idea that the craftsman of justice, just as any other practitioner of a skill, can employ his knowledge, to put the matter strongly, for either good or evil. The physician is good at curing or at secretly producing disease; the boxer is good at landing a blow or protecting himself from being hit; the good guardian is also good at thievery. In sum, the crafts involve skills that can produce
opposite results. Crafts are value-neutral; they are techniques for achieving goals. It is craftsmen who determine use based upon their desires for a given end. What Polemarchus does not see is that a physician who uses his knowledge to kill may be plausibly regarded as a man who has given up the medical craft. It may be argued that all crafts have good ends to which the techniques of the craft are subservient. When the techniques are separated from the τέλος, they are no longer part of that craft. Knowledge of a craft requires knowledge of the τέλος and an intention to reach that τέλος or one is no longer a craftsman. We shall return to this issue later.

When Polemarchus discovers that a just man is now a kind of thief, he is at a loss, "I don't any longer know what I meant,..." (334b7) Although he had a good intuition of justice as being a kind of character-trait, once it was assimilated to a kind of knowledge, he saw justice as being like other kinds of knowledge that are means to ends normally considered good, such as health, fighting, and food production, but that, as pure means, are capable of being used for other ends that are not usual, as medicine for the purpose of killing. He did not see justice as necessarily concerned with an end that is always the same, the good, and which cannot be altered without altering the knowledge and the pursuit.

This discussion with Polemarchus shows that Plato is well aware that skills employed within crafts that are normally considered part of the craft can be detached from the craft and viewed as pure means and value-neutral. It is possible, then, to construct an argument in which the craft-name is still used to label the technique or part but the τέλος of the craft is dropped. As we shall see, Plato does not accept the notion of a value-neutral craft except as an abstraction from the lived-kosmos. In the end all crafts will be subsumed under the notion of the good, just as all human action is; for, a craft is not simply a bit of knowledge but a knowledge of how to accomplish some task, an έργον. (It is not unimportant that επίστασθαι means to know how to.) Commentators have fastened on this argument with Polemarchus in order to
draw conclusions about the arguments with Thrasymachus, in some cases to argue that Plato is plainly duplicitous and manipulative. For, with Thrasymachus he appears to ignore the notion he employs here with Polemarchus, that crafts can be used for contrary purposes. They point out that Plato knows perfectly well that not only can the craft be used in contrary ways, but the craftsman choose to employ his knowledge as he sees fit and for his own ends, τέλος. To see a craft's techniques as value-neutral is to permit the decision of how to use the craft to fall to the practitioner. It is the physician who determines whether his medical skills shall be used to heal or to kill, not the medical craft, and anyone's 'how to' skills become subservient to whatever ends he chooses. So, when Plato employed this argument and revealed that he understood its significance, he was being unfair later on to use a notion of craft whereby a craft aims only at the good, a view which he knew could not be defended. In sum, so this view goes, Plato uses whichever notion he finds useful to win his argument.

The argument with Polemarchus continues and leads to a discussion in which the value-neutral notion of the craft is ignored; and it is ignored because it must be, if Socrates, by employing the craft argument, is going to convince Polemarchus that a good man, and so a just man, harms no one. Polemarchus agrees that craftsmen qua craftsmen by practicing their crafts, make things better, not worse: musicians, by practicing music, make men musical; the teachers of horsemanship, by practicing their craft, make men horsemen; and so men who practice justice, which is a human excellence, cannot make men bad but must make them good. In this argument Socrates does not allow the separation of craft from craftsman or craft from its τέλος so that the craft now cannot be subordinated to the craftsman's personal intentions. To what extent Plato can make this identification plausible will be examined later in conjunction with his argument with Thrasymachus. What we must be clear about now is that in his discussion with Polemarchus Plato uses two forms of the craft argument, one which sees the craft as value-neutral and as technique and a second which sees the craft as intrinsically connected to a good or τέλος.
III. The Craft Argument

After Socrates points out one of the consequences of Thrasymachus' empirical position, that since de facto rulers do make mistakes and do not act always in their own interest, they may rule obedient citizens who end up acting contrary to the best interests of the rulers, Thrasymachus asserts that his ruler ἄκριβει λόγω possesses the τέχνη of ruling, and such knowledge, by implication, contributes very much to his success. Socrates seizes upon Thrasymachus' new statement and by employing his own notion of τέχνη constructs the crucial refutation of Thrasymachus. The argument is a brief one and runs a bit over one Stephanus page, 341c4-342ell. The steps in the argument are as follows:

1. Every true craftsman is engaged in an activity directed towards an object. 341c4d4
   Plato has two examples, one of the physician and the other of the helmsman. The physician is a physician "in the strict sense," ὁ τῷ ἄκριβει λόγῳ ὕπατος, "the real physician," τὸν τῷ δυν ἄρτον δύνα . The helmsman is called a helmsman κατὰ τὴν τέχνην καὶ τὴν τῶν ναυτῶν ἀρχήν . A physician or helmsman in the strict sense is a real one due to his craft. The knowledge of the craft determines the being of the craftsman in relation to his craft.

2. There is something profitable for each (the craftsman and the object). 341d5-6
   Grube translates, "And there is something which is advantageous to each of these, that is: patients and sailors?" (The underlined portion indicates Grube's added explanation of the text.) The Greek is ambiguous, and I think it likely that, at the very least, Thrasymachus in his understanding is including both the craftsman and his object despite the fact that the discussion is now limited to true craftsmen. After all, the discussion is about craftsmen and their objects, and it would be natural to assume a broad reference. Socrates will not deny that knowledge of a craft is advantageous to the craftsman.
even though he will deny that it is the natural goal of the craft to provide such an advantage. At this point in the argument there is ambiguity, and it is not necessary to suppose that ἐκάστως τούτων clearly refers to the objects of the crafts alone.

3. Every craft naturally has the purpose of seeking and providing for the profit of each. 341d7-9

Socrates and Thrasymachus probably have a different understanding of ἐκάστως the one thinking of the object and the other including both the craftsman and the object. The argument in its next step considers the craftsman qua craft and not qua man or person and so sharply restricts the issues so that the benefit to the craftsman is ignored. The craftsman and his craft are indistinguishable, and attention is focused on the craft. In fact, Thrasymachus is puzzled by Socrates' next question. Thrasymachus immediately returns to this point at 343aff. where he reasserts his view that the practice of a craft is for the benefit of the craftsman. For Thrasymachus Socrates' reduction of the craftsman to his craft obscures the real issue. Socrates' restriction of the argument has underlying it Plato's views 1)of the Good and its connection to being, mind, and truth and 2)of nature, views which Thrasymachus did not share. I believe that Thrasymachus had no idea of the significance of this restriction in the argument until it was too late, for he apparently had a very different idea of knowledge.

4. What is profitable for every craft is to be as complete as possible. 341d10-11

a. The object to which the craft is directed is defective and in need.

The craft is designed to provide what is profitable for its object, viz. to remedy the defects of the object. 341e2-9
b. The craft itself is not defective or in need of any excellence. It never misses the mark. 342al-b8

c. Therefore, every craft seeks what is profitable for its object (since it itself is complete and in no need, whereas its object is in need and defective). 342c1-7

The argument has shifted away from the craftsman to the craft. Socrates continues the medical example and asserts that medicine was discovered
in order to remedy the defects of the body which is πονηρόν. In general πονηρός means to be in a bad condition and, here, defective, so that the body qua πονηρόν is in need, προσδείται. It is lacking and incomplete. Πονηρός is a common word, frequently used of people and meaning wicked, worthless, morally bad. Its opposite is ἀγαθός, morally good, useful. A τέχνη is designed to bring its object to its excellence or good, ἀρετή, just as, Socrates believes, a ruler's craft is designed to guide a community so that its citizens can reach their human good.

The craft, unlike its object, is τελέα and so has no needs. The eyes and the ears, like the body, need seeing and hearing as their goods, ἀρεται, but the crafts qua crafts (as knowledges) need no fulfillment. They are fulfilled and so possess their ἀρεται. Neither does any craft need a second craft, for each craft is sufficient for its object. Nor does it need itself to consider its own profit since there is no defect to be remedied; it has its good.

No craft possesses defects, πονηραί, or faults, ἀμαρτίαι, nor does any craft seek anything profitable except for its object. Each craft is undamaged, ἀθλαθής, and unmixed, ἀκέραιος, since it is correct, ἀρετή, as long as it is the exact, ἀκριβὴς, and whole, ὅλη, craft that it is, ἤπειρο ἔστιν.

5. Crafts have authority over their objects. 342c8-10

6. Therefore, no knowledge considers the advantage of the stronger but that of the weaker. 342c11-d1

Plato assimilates the entire discussion of τέχνη to ἐπιστήμη because he has been talking about a complete and perfect τέχνη. He frequently distinguishes the two where τέχνη is imperfect and based on limited,
temporal experience. The predicates of τελέα, ὄλη, and ἀκέραιος and the contrasting πουροῦν together with ζεί and προσδείταιaι prepared the ground for this conclusion. The craft is the stronger since it has no needs or defects. The objects of the crafts are weaker because they do have needs.

In this attempted refutation of Thrasymachus, Plato is applying his notion of Form to the question of the nature of justice from a perspective that allows him to communicate with Thrasymachus, who, most certainly, is not a man who would accept Plato’s doctrine of Form. For Plato knowledge, ἐπιστήμη, is always of Form; but since he cannot introduce his view directly, he uses familiar Socratic examples taken from the crafts. Ἐπιστήμη can easily become τέχνη because he is talking about justice as it exists in the behavior of states; the skills and knowledges involved are all practical. Furthermore, Socrates is convinced that the existence of the crafts, no matter how imperfect the knowledge may be, reveals that there is knowledge. Socrates' respect for craftsmen is based on their knowing how to do what they do, unlike politicians who have vague opinions and prejudices and cannot explain or defend what they do and frequently are incompetent in reaching whatever goals they do have. In order to convince people that there is knowledge of value and not just opinion, Socrates has them acknowledge that in an ordinary way we all recognize that there is craft-knowledge, τέχνη; next, that there are better and worse craftsmen; and finally that there must be a kind of ideal case, a complete knowledge of a craft that is the goal of the craftsman.

In this argument a craft exists for a purpose, to secure the advantage of its object and the advantage for itself which is to be ὁτι μάλιστα τελέαν. Οὗ καὶ ἡ τέχνη, ἢν δ᾿ ἔγιν, ἐπὶ τούτῳ πέφυκεν, ἐπὶ τῷ το συμφέρον
It is here that the practical and the theoretical come together. In order for a τέχνη that is established to obtain the good of the object which is its purpose, say medicine and healing, the τέχνη must be as complete as possible. There are, then, two advantages mentioned here that he wishes to unite, the good of the object for which the τέχνη was established and the good of the τέχνη which is its own knowledge of what it has to do.

Plato is suggesting that a τέχνη qua έπιστήμη is complete in itself but a τέχνη qua τέχνη is complete only in its use. A τέχνη can only be a τέχνη if it is a knowing in action. The very notion of a τέχνη helps to carry the point for him. By its very nature, τέχνη (341d-8), it has a purpose, and purposes are only attained in actions. The passage that follows, where Plato asks whether a τέχνη considers its own advantage (342b1), considers advantage in two senses. The τέχνη qua τελέα (ολη, not δι μάλιστα) has no advantage to seek since it already possesses its perfection in its own skill. The τέχνη qua directed to its object (e.g. healing) does seek an advantage that lies in the grounds of its own establishment, the healing of the body. So, a perfected skill does not seek its own advantage, since it already qua έπιστήμη is perfected, but seeks an advantage, nonetheless, in accomplishing its purpose, the well-being of its object.

To have knowledge for Plato is to use it. In the nature of things there is no gap between knowing and doing. To have a knowledge called medical points to its use, so, too, a knowledge called justice. I think White is correct when he says,

I am inclined to believe, in fact, that Plato thought that the mere apprehension of the Good could move a person to action without any other further step of any kind, and that, for him, to apprehend
the good fully along with a situation in which it might be exemplified simply is to have a desire overwhelming all others to see that instantiation take place.²⁴

Knowledge in its perfection is always a doing, a notion, I think, that is involved in the demiurge of the Timaeus who has no jealousy but brings goodness to the world. The doctrine is reflected in the notion of being as doing and undergoing in the Sophist. The fullness of being that is the characteristic of the Forms involves their acting, viz., being effective within the cosmos.

Craft-knowledge, just as knowledge of virtue, in common experience may be used or not, as we decide. Plato is supporting the Socratic belief that virtue is knowledge.²⁵ The craftsman qua craftsman will always do his best, but the craftsman as a complex human being may fail to apply his craft. Why does this happen? We may say that at that moment of action he does not possess his knowledge or he would use it; or else that a higher, more directive purpose determines the withholding of use for a perceived greater good. A physician may know how to heal his patient but may refuse to do so. He does not lack knowledge, but he refuses to use it. He refuses to be a healer of the sick in a particular case. He makes his decision on the basis of some value more important to him. Because of this difficulty Socrates' argument abandoned the craftsman for the craft. The craft, if operative, will do its best; the craftsman, however, may cease being a craftsman. On the other hand, since ruling is the highest and most complete craft because it encompasses under its control the full range of human actions and so includes all of virtue since it is knowledge of the good, the craft of ruling, if possessed in full, would never fail to be effective in the ruler. There are no rulers, however, who completely possess the knowledge of the ruling, just as no human can have complete knowledge of anything. The nature of the human soul prevents this from happening.²⁶
Plato is well aware that there is a gap in men between what they call knowing and acting, and even the philosopher kings may not escape the need to be compelled to perform their duties should they be reluctant to return to the cave. The embodied human, even if he be a philosophic ruler, is a complex of the multiple forces of ἐρωτία, and his soul will never be in total harmony. The argument before us, however, is a narrow one that focuses on the identity of power, knowledge, and being. To the extent that someone embodies knowing, he will act, for knowledge itself is not complete without its exercise. Knowledge is being and power. To the extent knowledge is not present there is no power from that domain. To have knowledge for Plato means that a person embodies knowledge so that he acts and is the knowledge. In being one's knowledge a person is good. If knowledge is possessed completely, there is no gap between knowing and acting in which a person may be said to 'know' that x is the right thing to do but that he is in doubt about actually doing it. This is a conviction derived from Parmenides and pervades his views of being and of the cosmos.

Part of this Platonic argument is that a τέχνη is established because the object to which it is applied has a need. At 341e4 medicine exists because the body is defective and is not self-sufficient; the purpose of medicine is to cure the body's ills. A critic may argue, however, that there are τέχναι that are not designed to remedy a defect in the craft's object. Some skills do not appear to seek the welfare of their objects, e.g. warfare, boxing, safecracking. Indeed, we may say that the whole class of competitive games seeks to win and, in the parlance of the sports writer, to annihilate one's opponent. It has always been a puzzle why Plato attempted to use the argument of the τέχναι to establish his point since there are skills that do not fit his model.

A physician tries to heal this body, an easily locatable object for which the benefit is obvious. A helmsman practices his skill in trying to bring his
ship safely to port, thereby preserving the ship, the cargo, any passengers, and his crew. If he is successful in bringing the ship safely to port, the cargo, passengers, and crew will be benefited. The purpose is accomplished when the object is safe and no longer at sea. Warfare, boxing, and safecracking, however, are not easily placed into the schema Plato is using. The general practices a craft whose purpose appears to be to win a battle or war by destroying its objects, enemy soldiers and property. He apparently practices his skill on objects that he does not intend to benefit. The boxer wishes to knock out his opponent (hardly to the opponent's benefit); and the safecracker wishes to open the safe, whose purpose and well-being lies in remaining closed. The safe may be destroyed by explosives or may be simply violated, contrary to its purpose. The objects acted on by the craft all seem to suffer rather than to benefit.

It has been pointed out, as well, that justice itself, even if it were a kind of craft-knowledge, would still be very different from other kinds of crafts. Indeed, it has been claimed that Socrates revealed as much in his argument with Polemarchus where justice was only useful when objects were not being used; or worse, justice became a kind of thievery. Justice is useful, however, in all situations and so is quite different from steering a ship, an activity that is useful only at sea, and from medicine, which is useful for the sick. So, not only are there problems with skills that are destructive but also with supposing justice is similar in its object-specification to other skills such as medicine and steersmanship.

I think plausible answers can be given to these objections. First of all, skills are designed to accomplish some task that needs to be done. The state of affairs that is the goal is not in existence, and in some sense the world lacks or is deficient qua this goal. Secondly, for Plato no τέχνη can exist which does not fit under the notion of the good; so, while Plato may grant that
skills can be used for evil purposes, I do not think he believes that these are licit or in accord with nature. In the end the practice of any skill is subsumed under a complex of actions, all of which must conduce to the production of good, otherwise the actions produce evil which is not a characteristic of being in its fullness (viz. in its eternity) but is a defect and a loss of power and so will lead to human wretchedness. To do good is to enhance power, and Plato sees all skills as aiming at such power, whether restoring power to the sick (medicine) or developing a power that is latent in the young (education). Martial skills are developed when the unity of community is threatened or has been destroyed. Their use has but one purpose, the restoration of or protection of the unity that is power. All persons are seen as needing correction (Gorgias 525b4-c1) in order to be guided to the good; so, τοις, πόλεις, or groups of men, need similar correction should they attack a good community. The practice of martial arts, whether in warfare or in boxing, is always defensive or corrective. Safecracking is an example of criminal activity, all of which is anti-social behavior disruptive of the community. The skills employed by the safecracker can all be used in other actions for good (unifying) purposes. In and of themselves the skills he uses unlock power that resides in being.

The use of skills, narrowly conceived, to destroy and to divide are doomed to failure in the long run because they create the divisive conditions dramatized by Plato in his brief example of the thieves (351aff.). Φόρμακς means both poison and a healing drug in recognition that a remedy can always be used for good or evil. The evil physician is one who possesses the narrow skills but does not embody the purpose of medicine within the hierarchy of goods. To call one a physician, ἰατρός, who does not know that he is such a healer, ἰατὴρ, is to misapply the word. Such a man does not know what he is as a man and so cannot locate the proper exercise of his skill. The
same, for Plato, applies to the general or the boxer. The evil general is one who does not understand that the goal of war is peace and so is a general ambiguously. Justice is a skill that has as its object the securing of the human good by the maintenance of order according to a hierarchy of powers that produce good. From the time Thrasymachus introduces the notion of the infallible ruler the argument is idealized. Even later, when Thrasymachus abandons the discussion in ideal terms, the Socratic assumptions of τέχνη and έπιστήμη are still present. We can think of skills in a narrow way, to be used for good or ill, but in the end Plato does not think this is a correct understanding of their nature, since skills exist only as practiced by persons. Skills can be treated as abstractions, but in fact we only have persons with skills. The key to appreciating Plato's point is seeing that all human activities exist only as means for the good. To abstract the activity, such as skill, from the broader idea of good is to make a serious error.
IV. The Just Man is Wise

As pointed out earlier, after the craft argument Thrasymachus re-emphasizes his views and continues to develop his position. Socrates is now no longer concerned about Thrasymachus' definition of justice but about his glorification of the life of injustice. Socrates formulates three successive arguments to show that justice is wisdom, strength, and happiness. I shall examine only the argument concerning wisdom since it is the most relevant to the craft argument and to suggesting Plato's views of Form and the nature of the cosmos.

Thrasymachus has claimed that the unjust man is wise and powerful and that he strives to get as much as he can. In the craft argument Socrates tried to show that any craftsman-knower in the practice of his craft pursues the good of the object, not of himself considered apart from his craft. The practice of a craft may run counter to the satisfaction of the desires, broadly considered, of the craftsman. 'Getting more for oneself' is not a motto for any craftsman qua craftsman and is irrelevant to him. Socrates now tries to indicate the nature of the good that the object needs and that the craftsman provides. He suggests that 'getting more' is not only foreign to a craftsman and his craft but also to the object of the craft as well. 53

πλεονεξία, πλεονεκτεῖν, and πλέον έχειν mean greediness, arrogance, excess, to have more than one's share, to take advantage, to have the best of, and, as Grube says, "...come(s) to mean 'to outdo, to over-reach, to do better than'". 32 To have more has been shown to be irrelevant to knowledge which is complete in itself. A craftsman qua craftsman is fulfilled and satisfied in his knowledge. To have more or an advantage involves comparison and pertains to actions that are in themselves not subject to inherent limit. Socrates shows that the task of the craftsman is to hit the mark or to attain the proper balance in order to achieve the good of the object. 33
The argument employed by Socrates seems so needlessly complex that Cornford omitted its translation in his famous edition, claiming that "only a very loose paraphrase could liberate the meaning from the stiff form of the original." Socrates himself acknowledges that any attempt to persuade Thrasyvos at this point will be harder since Thrasyvos "includes injustice under virtue and wisdom, and justice among their opposites." (348e1-6) Socrates has already employed his principal direct arguments, viz. the craft arguments, so he now turns to an indirect form. The argument falls into four sections. The first is a characterization of the unjust and just man in terms of \(\pi\lambda\epsilon\omicron\ \epsilon\chi\epsilon\omicron\nu\) (349b2-c10); the second produces the principle that both the unjust and just man have such characteristics as those whom they are like (349cll-d12); the third shows that no knower, as evidenced by the musician and the physician, wishes to \(\nu\lambda\epsilon\omega\ \alpha\iota\rho\epsilon\iota\sigma\omega\) than a fellow expert (349d13-350a10); and finally the conclusion is drawn that the unjust man is like the ignorant man in his \(\nu\lambda\epsilon\omicron\nu\epsilon\zeta\iota\alpha\), while the just man is akin to the wise man (350a11-c11).

In the first two parts of the argument Plato employs the ambiguous \(\pi\lambda\epsilon\omicron\ \epsilon\chi\epsilon\omicron\nu\) to describe both the unjust man, in the sense of 'have more,' and the just man, in the sense of 'do better,' because Thrasyvos applies the notion of \(\pi\lambda\epsilon\omicron\ \epsilon\chi\epsilon\omicron\nu\) to his hero and so willingly connects wisdom to it. The terms of the discourse are exactly what Thrasyvos wants, and he must have smiled with satisfaction when Socrates claimed that the just man would think it just and worthwhile \(\alpha\delta\iota\nu\omicron\ \nu\lambda\epsilon\omicron\nu\epsilon\kappa\tau\epsilon\iota\nu\) (349b8). Here is Socrates claiming that a just man 'wants more' and so would like to be \(\nu\rho\epsilon\iota\tau\omicron\nu\), as Thrasyvos' first definition indicated, but cannot be such because he is powerless! In this fashion Thrasyvos commits himself to injustice as \(\nu\lambda\epsilon\omicron\nu\epsilon\zeta\iota\alpha\) and \(\nu\lambda\epsilon\omicron\nu\epsilon\zeta\iota\alpha\) as wisdom and goodness.

Socrates goes on in parts three and four to show that a wise and good man does not want \(\pi\lambda\epsilon\omicron\ \epsilon\chi\epsilon\omicron\nu\), so that the unjust man in \(\nu\lambda\epsilon\omicron\nu\epsilon\kappa\tau\epsilon\iota\nu\) is the opposite of the wise and good; he is ignorant and bad. The conclusion is supposed to hold because the knower's relation to the not-knower is parallel or like the relation of the just man to the unjust man. In terms of the fourth part of the argument, that the knower does not want
nor does he think it good to have more (do better than) another knower whereas he does
want to do better (have more) than a non-knower is like the relation of the just man
to the unjust man. Since the relations are like each other, have the same char-
acteristics. Thrasymachus had claimed that the unjust man always wants more and
gets it and this constitutes his wisdom and his goodness. To indicate to Thrasymachus
that this view cannot be correct, Socrates develops a counter sequence that begins
with a knower, a musician or a physician, and shows that his relation to the non-
expert rests partially on πλέον έχειν, since the knower has more knowledge than the
non-expert who knows little or nothing. This 'having more knowledge' means, of course,
a recognition of limit in tuning and in healing and is a tantalizing Socratic para-
dox that lies below the surface. 'Having more' in some sense is accepting limit.
The knower in relation to another knower, however, never wants to have more or do
better. So, the knower's relation to his opposite is parallel to the relation of
the just man to the unjust man. Socrates thinks that he has shown that πλεονεξία
cannot be a characteristic of wise men in relation to each other and to their objects;
and wise men are only paradoxically πλέον έχειν in relation to ignorant men. Wise
men are not characterized by wanting more. When they interact with the objects of
their knowledge, they seek to establish a limit in those objects. Such an argument
suggests that wisdom must bring with it, both for the craftsman and for his object,
limit.

Socrates seems to establish only that a just man and a wise man resemble each
other, not that a just man is wise. Yet, this argument continues to develop the con-
trast that emerged in the first series of arguments with Thrasymachus, that between
the man of πλεονεξία who is forever incomplete, striving to outdo, to overreach, and
to overcome, and the craftsman whose craft is complete and whole and who attempts to
introduce such wholeness as he can into the objects of his craft that/in need. Socrates
tries to show to Thrasymachus that πλέον ἔχειν and its incompleteness do not characterize knowers nor any of the objects known that are in good condition. The wise man is always a person who 'in tightening and loosening' does not seek to excel another knower. This argument is quite abstract and does not directly introduce the notion of measure except by the implication of tuning in the actions of the musician and 'balancing' in the case of the physician, but surely Plato's intentions are clear enough.
In timeless objects one cannot get more than the whole of what is, and the fulfillment of the ideal knower rests on the wholeness of the object. In time, however, there is a mixing of parts, not a wholeness. The entities in time can never be what they are since they are always in process of becoming. In time the craftsman is always blending characteristics, such as balancing the tensions of strings or the powers of the body to produce what is the best possible at the moment. To hit the mark is to attain what is highest and most complete in action; to get more or less of any characteristic is to produce a poor mix and to miss what is best. The completion or fulfillment in time is filling the now with the most that it can receive of its proper ingredients—and this mix is the best.

Because time is pictured as a line, we can speak of an ὀρθός amount, a correct or straight amount, which is the harmonious blend of qualities that produces the excellence of the object, for the correct amount allows the object to pursue a straight path to its fulfillment. It is only a total knowledge which can decide the correct measure of ingredients for a temporal object that can never fulfill all of what it can be in a changing world. Only by knowing the whole of what objects are can one decide how incomplete mixes of particulars can attain what is best for them. The recipe, the μέτρον, is the application of the whole to its part.50

The craft argument discloses that knowledge (and its object, Form) is complete, whereas objects, the entities in space and time that knowledge is applied to, are in need and incomplete. Socrates supposes there is an ultimate good in which the needs of the object can be satisfied, while Thrasymachus sees only a continuous search for satisfaction. Socrates now indicates that the
wisdom of knowledge in time is knowing how to measure the ingredients of the moment to maximize the excellence of the object. There is a limit, then, in time that is the good, a measure, just as there is the limit in the eternal that is the total good, a whole.34

Seeking only to get more will produce happiness according to Thrasymachus, whereas for Socrates happiness is getting enough. Implied in the Thrasymachan view is a constant struggle to obtain what is needed to produce temporary satisfactions. The goods that he seems to be thinking about are those that Socrates will condemn as false pleasures in Book  . The Socratic view is that some relief from the struggle in human life can be obtained, provided the proper goods are pursued. In human life happiness is produced not by attempting to satisfy a multiplying group of random desires but by finding a kind of serenity produced by seeing things sub specie aeternitatis. Socrates has shown Thrasymachus that knowledge is whole and complete, so not in need, but Thrasymachus persists in holding onto his goal of 'getting more', not realizing, in Socrates' view, that his formula is fatally quantitative because it is based entirely on satisfying those needs that have no inherent limit. To get enough in time requires a limit, the proper measure, which is the whole of the moment; so if one wishes to be satisfied while living in a changing world, one must seek out those activities that permit an enduring wholeness rather than those that fade in the moment. Thrasymachus' view misconceives the nature of the cosmos and so, too, the role and peculiar power of νοός in bringing wholeness, and so what is enough, to human beings.

It is also true that there is a quantitative dimension to Plato's views. He assumes that what persists is better, and so the valuationally higher must last longer. The pleasures of sex, food, and exercise are activities that can produce joy, but the satisfaction is for a short time and is more or less mixed with pain. The instability of wealth, reputation, and health, always present on
any classical list of desirables, reveals their drawbacks. In the end the internal exercise of \( \nu\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron \) and its pleasures are superior, partially, because they suffer the least possibility of being taken away. Getting more of some things, however, for Plato means acquiring what is qualitatively better. These are the things in which limited knowledge which is rooted in the fullness of eternity. For Plato the transitory nature of certain pleasures indicates their rootedness in change. Their natures involve more change as part of their realization in time than do others. In what way Plato supposes the joys of the mind are qualitatively better than the joys of the body I shall leave unexamined.
FOOTNOTES

1C.E.M. Joad wrote an interesting tract entitled Thrasymachus in 1926 that contemporary readers should find interesting for its views of morality in the twenties and prospects for the future. In reference to the discussions with Cephalus and Polemarchus he says, "Several tentative definitions of Justice are given, which Socrates has no difficulty in showing to be inadequate by the peculiarly irritating methods of dialectic for which the Athenians so excusably poisoned him." p. 1

2338c 1-2 (All citations of the Greek text are from Burnet's Oxford edition. Quotations in English are taken from Grube's edition.) οἰμὼ γὰρ ἐγὼ εὖν τὸ δίκαιον σωμάτων. I follow Kerferd in believing that Thrasymachus does not regard this statement as a definition but as "a deliberate paradox framed in terms such as to arrest the attention,..." I, p. 26. This initial formulation is framed from the point of view of the ruled only. For Thrasymachus' justice is another's good and injustice one's own good, 344c 7-8. Sparshott regards Thrasymachus' answer as "not an improved criterion but an illuminating truth about the actions agreed to be just." p. 423 Kerferd defends his interpretation in Phronesis against Hourani. For a detailed rejection of Kerferd, see J.P. Maguire's article. P.P. Nicholson defends Kerferd's view of what Thrasymachus wants to argue and provides an excellent summary of the issues. I share most of Nicholson's views and believe his presentation is one of the best in the literature. See pp. 227-229 for his summary of why Thrasymachus begins with this paradox rather than with his definition which comes later.

3 If Thrasymachus' real definition of justice is the interest of another, does Socrates ever address this issue? Not directly, since the discussion moves away from the issue of the definition of justice to its consequences. He cannot, however, effectively debate this issue with Thrasymachus until he turns the discussion away from justice as a social phenomenon allied with ruling to justice as a characteristic of a human soul. The prior debate largely considered justice as a function of a ruler and his citizens. Now, I think, because Thrasymachus has delivered himself of his genuine view of the nature of justice, in the arguments concerning strength and happiness Socrates begins to move the focus to the individual and his internal well-being. It is clear that the Thrasymachian definition is the opposite of Socrates' view. Justice, for Socrates, is advantageous to a man for himself and for another, since justice is the functioning of goodness in the individual and in the polis. Goodness is never jealous; and so, when a good man comes into existence, he enjoys the experienced goodness in himself and in its manifestations towards others. Socrates' developed position in Book Nine reveals that in the first instance justice and goodness are characteristics of a human soul which manifest themselves in human behavior.

4 That Thrasymachus'as a position that commentators agree upon is far from the case. The literature is fairly extensive, so I shall not review it here. Whether he is a nihilist, ethical naturalist, legalist, psychological egoist, to use Kerferd's classification, or something else I shall not argue. There are reasons for thinking that he is all of these because his 'view' is not developed in detail. Modern commentators have particular difficulty, I think, because they are looking for a strong concept of obligation, for presumably without a meaningful sense of ought, there is no moral theory;
but such a strong notion of ought is simply not there. Discussions of Thrasymachus' and Plato's positions in terms of 'right' obscure the views that they actually held. For both Socrates and Thrasymachus obligation is an imperfect condition resting on an inadequate knowledge of what is the good in general and what it is for a particular person. If someone knows the good, he shall surely do it. To feel obliged to do an act means that he is acting with doubts or resistances to the goodness of the act, particularly its goodness for him. Thrasymachus regards just men as weak, physically inadequate or intellectually foolish or both. To pursue what one wants is not a matter of obligation for Thrasymachus, and he would have regarded it as silly to suppose that anyone should need to feel obliged. If a man does feel obliged, it is the result of successful social conditioning by the people in power, and such obligation is designed for their benefit, not his. A second difficulty that I find among commentators is the vague use of the word 'moral.' The term is usually undefined so it is difficult to know what the writer is including or excluding. Commentators seem to be searching for the aforementioned doctrine of obligation and some associated notion of will or choice in order to satisfy themselves that Thrasymachus has an ethical theory to account for what is moral, non-moral, and immoral. Nicholson seems to hold a view similar to my own, pp. 216-217.

6347e 2-4 πολὺ δὲ μοι δοκεῖ μείζον εἶναι ὡ νόν λέγει θρασύμαχος, τὸν τοῦ ἀδίκου βίον ἄδικων εἶναι κρείττω ἢ τὸν τοῦ δικαίου. English cannot capture the importance of the ambiguity in κρείττω here and κρείττονος of the original definition. In the first passage it is regularly rendered by 'stronger' and in this one by 'better.' As far as the word is concerned, what is better is stronger and vice versa, although κρείττονος may be used in contexts where either meaning seemingly overwhims the other. The contrasting word is ἡττων which may be rendered 'inferior' and 'weaker.'

8338d 7- 339a 4

9Thrasymachus makes his claim not only for the ruler and the craftsman but also for the wise man: ὥστε δημιουργὸς ἢ σοφὸς ἢ ἀρχων ὁδικαὶ ἀμορτανεί τότε ὁ ἀρχων ἤ. 340e 4-5

10"In effect he (Socrates) is calling upon Thrasymachus further to define his position and is pointing out that Thrasymachus is offering two accounts of justice. You can either define justice as 'the interest of the stronger' or as 'the laws which the stronger make,' but not as both since there will be occasions when the two do not coincide." Kerferd I, p. 20

11340c 6-341a 4 P.P. Nicholson, pp. 224-225, argues against those who believe that Thrasymachus has blundered "by abandoning a realistic empiricism for an idealism which makes him an easy victim for Socrates,..." Nicholson denies that Thrasymachus has been manipulated and concludes that "the perfect ruler is a crucial and logically deliberate step in the unfolding of his ideas. By taking it, Thrasymachus has raised the whole argument to a higher level." At 339c 4-8 Thrasymachus grants that laws can be made correctly, to the ruler's advantage, or incorrectly, not to his advantage. Correctly made laws would be just; incorrectly made ones, unjust. There is, then, a standard of measurement for advantage. He reaffirms this view when he defends the notion of an infallible ruler. This position shows that Thrasymachus believes that the world can be known and mistakes can be made. He is as committed to knowledge as Socrates is, but it is doubtful that he had ever explored what ontological commitments his belief in knowledge might entail.
Rather, since Thrasymachus has argued the ruler's infallibility on the basis of an analogy between the art of ruling and other arts, like those of the craftsman and physician, he turns the analogy against his opponent. Kerferd thinks that this argument begs the question completely. But it seems to me to be a clever dialectical retort.

Davis, p. 427

Thrasymachus works within the framework of ordinary language use, so his ideal man is called unjust. His view, however, distinguishes between a natural condition of πλεονεξία and a conventional justice which depends on the enactments of the ruler. Should the νόμοι actually be in the interest of the stronger, the ruler, they very well may not be in the interest of the weaker, the citizens, and so in violation of the citizens' own πλεονεξία. Since the weaker are weak, however, they simply cannot achieve their wishes. Other interpreters who also see a close relation between Thrasymachus and the position put forward by Glaucan are Cross and Woozley, p. 69; Annas, pp. 8-9; also P.P. Nicholson remarks, "...men are in competition for scarce resources..." p. 223.

The shift has already occurred in Thrasymachus' retort to the craft argument where he defines injustice in relation to the individual, τό δέ δύνατον έποιηθείσαν τε και συμφέρον. 344c 8

This point is made later at 346a 1-3 where Plato uses δόναμιν. This short argument runs to 346e 2 and at 346d 5 he uses δργον.

In Book Two justice is placed in the class of pursuits that are good in themselves and for their consequences. I think Socrates would similarly place all knowledge. See White pp. 48ff. on the question of benefits to the fully just man.

At the time I wrote the following analyses I had not read Charles Young's excellent dissertation in which he documents the close connection between τέχνη and ἐπιστήμη in some Platonic arguments. Nor have I been able to include at this time any of his other valuable insights.

It becomes clear later that a τέχνη in itself never seeks or provides for itself because it is complete and has no needs. A τέχνη, however, as possessed
by any given craftsman is incomplete, so that a craftsman is always at work trying
to gain more skill. At this point in the argument the claim is plausible, so
Thrasymachus has no objection.

White, p. 49

Cross and Woozley, pp. 51-55, discuss the issue of Socrates' belief that
virtue is knowledge in conjunction with the later discussion at 348c - 351c,
where the implications of the craft argument arise again.

Plato is careful in the Republic to qualify his assertions by phrases such as,
"as much as a man can," phrases which are particularly prominent in his discussion
of the philosophic ruler. I think it is clear from Plato's metaphysical position
that no temporal ruler could in ordinary consciousness possess the full know-
ledge of anything. The return to the cave is the process of forgetting and the
descent to imperfection. The philosophic ruler is the best human that can
arise but he or she is not perfect.

Plato is distinguishing "a man's capacities on the one hand and on the other hand his
dispositions or character." p. 14 Plato is certainly aware of the difference
noted, but his psychology regards both as forms of knowledge. Both fall under
the most general concept, the good, as I argue shortly. In the notion of the crafts
advanced here Plato holds that no craft can be abstracted legitimately from its
end and treated as a value-free technique. See Cross and Woozley pp. 48-51 for
additional comments about the craft argument.

Cross and Woozley, pp. 11-16, assert that Plato has shown an important
difference between justice and the crafts in his argument with Polemarchus. Any
skill has a capacity for opposites; it can be used well or ill. But the same
cannot be true for justice, otherwise "The rogue and scoundrel will be as much
a just man as is the honest dealer, the difference between them being that the
former uses his justice for bad ends, the latter for good." p. 13 Plato is
distinguishing "a man's capacities on the one hand and on the other hand his
dispositions or character." p. 14 Plato is certainly aware of the difference
noted, but his psychology regards both as forms of knowledge. Both fall under
the most general concept, the good, as I argue shortly. In the notion of the crafts
advanced here Plato holds that no craft can be abstracted legitimately from its
end and treated as a value-free technique. See Cross and Woozley pp. 48-51 for
additional comments about the craft argument.

"For a very different view see Sparshott, p. 436, where he distinguishes
between service arts and exploitation arts. P.P. Nicholson seems to share my
basic conviction. "Only when the idea of the Form of the Good is broached do
we finally understand why Plato sees a necessary connection between arts and
justice, via his conception of knowledge." p. 231

Cross and Woozley compare this argument to the argument with Polemarchus,
pp. 53-55. For sharp disapproval of the argument see Sparshott pp. 443-445;
Cross and Woozley pp. 51-55.

Grube, p. 22, fn. 11

That health is a harmony is understood to parallel the example of tuning the
lyre.
The whole as the measure is used by Plato, for example, in discussion of the judge (409d 7-el) where virtue, a whole, will know itself and vice, whereas vice, a defect, will know neither itself nor virtue. More explicitly at 504c 1-3, "Nothing which is incomplete is a measure of anything,..." And at 486d 7 truth is akin to proper measure, ἐμετρότα, not to lack of measure, ὀμετρότα.

Because men are not perfect and there is the gap between knowing and acting, Socrates needs the more complex psychological analysis later in the Republic. Man not only possesses νοῦς and ἐπιθυμία but also θυμός which can be habituated to become an ally of νοῦς. Since a man cannot retain knowledge, which is a grasp of the completeness of Form, in a changing soul and body, he needs a psycholgocial support for his opinions, viz. θυμός. The craft argument is an idealized account. If craft knowledge has the characteristics Plato attributes to it, and if justice results from such a knowledge, then a man embodying this knowledge will never fail to be just. Such a view leaves out of account the question of whether knowledge as it exists in man can be overthrown by another characteristic in man, his passions. Because of the narrowness and abstractness of the argument no one is convinced. Men, as Thrasymachus, Glaucon, Adeimantus, and Socrates know them, appear to act differently, and Thrasymachus is rightly angered by Socrates' unwillingness to take on the more complex issues.

That 'getting more' is also irrelevant to a man as a whole requires the more detailed argument of the remainder of the Republic. The implication is that there must be a 'balance' and 'tuning' in man as there is in bodily health and lyres. This extension Socrates makes as an addendum to the argument concerning strength at 352a 5-8. Later, as here, it is man's participation in knowing that allows him to measure his behavior.