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Thrasymachos' *Eristikos*: The *Agon Logon* in Republic I *

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Some readers of Plato would like to find a consistent doctrine of justice in the arguments that Thrasymachos, the Sophist, is made to offer in Republic I. Professor Klosko argues here that this quest for consistency is misguided. He suggests that if the text is read as depicting an organized dialectical competition between Thrasymachos and Socrates, which is how it should be read, the poor quality of Thrasymachos' reasoning is easily understood.

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The continuing controversy over the interpretation of Thrasymachos' doctrine of justice in *Republic I* is caused by the fact that, at different times in the Book, he seems to give different accounts of the nature of justice. At least three such accounts are proffered. Initially, in response to Socrates' request for a definition, he presents his notorious formula that justice is:

(T1) the advantage of the stronger (τὸ τοῦ κρείττονος συμφέρον; 338c2).

Forced to state his meaning more clearly, the Sophist defines justice as adherence to laws. In all cities, he says, political power is held by a ruling party (τὸ ἄρχον) or stronger party, which "enacts the laws with a view to its own advantage," and calls obedience to these laws "just" and disobedience "unjust" (338d7–339a4). Thus, justice turns out to be:

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6 Thrasymachos' *Eristikos*

(T2) obedience to the laws (which are enacted by the stronger party in each city).

However, as Thrasymachos is forced to elaborate further, he presents a third view of justice, that it is:

(T3) the other fellow's good and one's own harm.

The basic idea here is that, in dealings between just and unjust individuals, the latter end up with larger shares of the proceeds because of their injustice, while the former end up with smaller because of their justice (esp. 343d–344c).

Much has been written on Thrasymachos, and scholars have taken great pains and applied considerable ingenuity to the task of shaping this series of propositions into one consistent view of justice.¹ However, I am inclined to think that none of these attempts has proved successful. In this paper I argue that this entire quest for consistency is misguided, and I shall explain below why we should be content with a Thrasymachos who holds something less than a consistent view of justice.

Now, it is not surprising that a number of commentators have responded to the challenge of finding a consistent doctrine of justice hidden inside Thrasymachos' various utterances in *Republic* I. The most obvious reason for this is that such a view—one that is “plausible,” “persuasive,” and, perhaps, “accurate”²—is indeed to be found just beneath the surface of the Sophist's various arguments. The problem, however, is that this view must be distinguished from what Thrasymachos actually *says*. The fact is that a good deal of what he says runs counter

1. The major pieces in the Thrasymachos literature are the following: G. B. Kerferd, “The Doctrine of Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic*,” *Durham University Journal* 9 (1947); G. Hourani, “Thrasymachus' Definition of Justice in Plato's *Republic*,” *Phronesis* 7 (1962); Kerferd, “Thrasymachus and Justice: A Reply,” *Phron* 9 (1964); R. Cross and A. Woozley, *Plato's Republic: A Philosophical Commentary* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), ch. 2; F. Sparshott, “Socrates and Thrasymachus,” *The Monist* 50 (1966); E. Harrison, “Plato's Manipulation of Thrasymachus,” *Phoenix* 21 (1967); T. Henderson, “In Defense of Thrasymachus,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 7 (1970); J. Maguire, “Thrasymachus . . . or Plato?” *Phron* 16 (1971); P. Nicholson, “Unravelling Thrasymachus' Arguments in the *Republic*,” *Phron* 19 (1974). Also: D. Allan, *Plato: Republic Book I*, 2d ed. (London: Methuen, 1944), esp. pp. 25–33; W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, 6 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962–81), vol. III, ch. 4; A. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), esp. pp. 270–277; S. Harlap, “Thrasymachus' Justice,” *Political Theory* 7 (1979). The most notable upholders of Thrasymachus' consistency are Kerferd, Sparshott, Henderson, and Nicholson; the most notable advocate of inconsistency is Maguire, whose view is closest to my own. Further references, up to 1947, are found in Kerferd's (1947) notes.

2. Henderson, “In Defense of Thrasymachus,” p. 227.

to the best possible formulation of his case. Thus, in order to find this view (the “consistent position”) in the text of the *Republic*, the commentator is forced to distort and misconstrue what Thrasymachos actually says (the “actual position”).

Before moving on to contrast these two positions, it may be useful to say something of a more general nature about the issue of “consistency” in cases such as this. It seems to me that there are times when the assumption that a doctrine put into the mouth of one of Plato’s characters is consistent or is meant to be, consistent (or is meant to evidence some other philosophical attribute) can impede a proper understanding of Plato’s text. Proceeding from this assumption, the commentator declares that he will not “prejudge” the issue of consistency, and so will attempt to find a consistent interpretation, unless this proves impossible.³ The objection to this approach is that it shifts the burden of proof unfairly onto those who would argue for an absence of consistency. To assume that the text in question is consistent unless it can be *proven* otherwise is frequently to apply too rigid a standard. Especially in a case such as the doctrine of Thrasymachos, in which the text is sketchy to begin with,⁴ it is difficult to find an unmistakable instance in which the character flatly contradicts himself. But nothing less than this will dissuade the seeker of “consistency.” If the character *appears* to contradict himself, this is merely a problem to be overcome through ingenious interpretation. It often seems that nothing less than the character’s saying *A* and *not-A* in a single sentence will do.⁵

The problem here, a common one, highlights the unusual difficulties associated with interpreting Plato’s dialogues—especially the earlier, more dramatic ones.⁶ It seems that commentators often neglect the

3. Kerferd, “Doctrine of Thrasymachus,” p. 20; Henderson, “In Defense of Thrasymachus,” p. 219; Nicholson, “Unravelling Thrasymachus’ Arguments,” p. 213.

4. The bulk of Thrasymachos’ argument is presented in two passages, comprising some sixty-eight of Burnet’s lines (338d7–339a4, 343b1–344c8).

5. Cf. Henderson, “In Defense of Thrasymachus”: “there seem to be no textual considerations precluding it” (p. 221); “there is no textual reason to believe” (loc. cit.); then, when inconsistency does crop up in the text: “It could hardly be the case, as some commentators have suggested,” because this would yield inconsistency (loc. cit.). Kerferd argues similarly (“Doctrine of Thrasymachus,” p. 26); on this, see Maguire, “Thrasymachus or Plato,” p. 148, n. 20.

6. It is not necessary here to ask whether the first book of the *Republic* was ever a separate dialogue (the *Thrasymachos*) as it is believed to have been by certain scholars: for example, P. Friedlander, *Plato*, 3 vols., trans. H. Meyerhoff (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958–69), vol. II, ch. 3; H. Von Arnim, *Platos Jugenddialoge und die Entstehungszeit des Phaidros* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1914), pp. 71 ff. It is indisputable that it is similar in crucial respects—nature of inquiry, dramatic action, etc.—to a number of the early, Socratic dialogues.

8 Thrasymachos' *Eristikos*

“sound principles of literary interpretation,” invoked by Shorey at the beginning of this century,⁷ which are a necessary companion to even the greatest philosophical sophistication. Many of these difficulties come to a head over the issue of fallacious argument, for many commentators tend to forget that in certain situations Plato intentionally puts weak arguments into the mouths of his characters—Socrates included.⁸ That there are such circumstances is obviously true. There can be no doubt that Socrates' interlocutors in a number of elenctic dialogues—Laches, Euthyphro, Ion, to name three—are “mere children in argument,”⁹ but because their weak arguments occur in a recognizable dramatic setting, to which their weakness makes a clear contribution, the commentator is not normally misled into supposing that their poor quality is anything but intentional on Plato's part.

A basic premise in my argument here is that there are also other situations in the dialogues in which Plato makes his characters advance weak and/or fallacious arguments.¹⁰ I submit that the encounter between Socrates and Thrasy Machos in *Republic* I is meant to represent such a situation. Both use arguments that are seriously lacking from a philosophical point of view and, since they do so in a recognizable dramatic setting in which sophistical arguments are a routine occurrence, their weaknesses must be understood as intentional on the part of Plato. We will see that Thrasy Machos' arguments, in addition to being inconsistent in certain particular respects, are weak in several other ways. In light of this general weakness, it seems ill-advised to expect that one may reduce his series of arguments to a consistent position.

7. P. Shorey, *The Unity of Plato's Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1903), p. 5.

8. I am inclined to discount the suggestion that Plato's Thrasy Machos is *not* one of Plato's characters—that he is somehow the historical Thrasy Machos and therefore has some sort of independence from Plato. Cf. Nicholson, “Unravelling Thrasy Machos' Arguments,” p. 213; Harlap, “Thrasy Machos' Justice,” p. 351.

9. To use Jowett's characterization of Thrasy Machos in B. Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato Translated into English*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), vol. II, 6).

10. Many complex issues are associated with Plato's use of fallacy but they cannot be explored here. I have discussed the question of criteria at length in my article, “Criteria of Fallacy and Sophistry for Use in the Analysis of Platonic Dialogues,” *Classical Quarterly* 33 (1983). Suffice it to say here that arguments must be looked at in the context of the *elenchos*, while validity or fallaciousness must be assessed *from the point of view of the interlocutor*. Tacit premises cannot be read into arguments in order to make them valid, unless the material such premises contain would be acceptable to the interlocutor. The criterion of both fallacy and argumentative weakness used here is that these would be easily detected and countered by a skilled opponent in a dialectical interchange.

I make my argument here in three parts. First, I examine Thrasy-machos' doctrine of justice in order to point out some of its serious defects. I then attempt to locate the debate between Socrates and Thrasy-machos in a particular cultural context. It is my contention that it should be understood as an *agon logon* (a duel of arguments), some sort of organized dialectical competition. In order to demonstrate this, I discuss eristic disputation in Section II, and then, in Section III, examine the similarities between the debate between Socrates and Thrasy-machos and the rules and conventions of eristic.¹¹ When the debate is understood as an eristic competition, the reason for the poor quality of Thrasy-machos' performance becomes apparent.

I. Thrasy-machos' Doctrine of Justice

The profound truth about the nature of justice that is both concealed and revealed in Thrasy-machos' combined speeches is that, in many of the transactions between individuals that constitute the lifeblood of any society, if one individual behaves justly towards others, this very fact makes him vulnerable to exploitation by them.¹² As Thrasy-machos later puts it, justice is "high-minded foolishness,"¹³ and this general thesis is probably the best and most coherent view he could present. As Henderson notes,¹⁴ Socrates and Thrasy-machos generally agree about the kinds of actions or practices that are just—for example, paying debts, honoring contracts—just as, in other Socratic dialogues, there is little disagreement about the kinds of acts that are pious, temperate, or courageous.¹⁵ The point the Sophist wishes to make about justice is that it does not pay. Taking for granted a generally accepted view of the things that are of value—money, honor, power—Thrasy-machos argues that breaking the rules of justice is a better, more efficient way of accumulating these goods than is following them. Thus, if someone conducts himself justly in his dealings with others, they are able to take advantage of him, and they will probably end up with some of his share of

11. The argument here continues a line of interpretation begun in my paper, "Toward a Consistent Interpretation of the *Protagoras*," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 61 (1979).

12. Henderson ("In Defense of Thrasy-machus," p. 220) and Sparshott ("Socrates and Thrasy-machus," pp. 431–432) argue that this is the essence of Thrasy-machos' view.

13. *γενναίαν ἐνθθειαν*; 348c12; trans. G. M. A. Grube, *Plato's Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1974).

14. Henderson, "In Defense of Thrasy-machus," p. 219.

15. Cf. G. Santas, *Socrates* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 115–118.

goods in addition to their own. It appears that this view represents the substance of Thrasymachos' fine speech at 343c–344c (in which (T3) is presented). Put epigrammatically, this is indeed the view that justice is “one's own harm” and “the other fellow's advantage,” and had Thrasymachos stuck to expounding and polishing this view, he would have had something interesting, perhaps important, to say about the nature of justice. And so it is not surprising that the bulk of the recent Thrasymachos literature has argued that his “true” doctrine is to be found in (T3) and the 343c–344c speech.¹⁶

As I have noted above, it is necessary to distinguish the best case Thrasymachos could have made (the consistent position) from the one he actually made. Although the view outlined above could, perhaps, form the groundwork for a properly shocking illumination of justice, we should not be surprised to see that much of what Thrasymachos says does not rest at all well with it.

First of all, in order to maintain our consistent position, Thrasymachos would have to concentrate on justice *from the point of view of the just man*. Since his thesis is mainly concerned with the adverse effects of adhering to the social rules and practices that constitute justice, he should focus his discussion on these effects. But Thrasymachos does not do this. He departs from this strategy as soon as he begins to define justice. For his initial assertion that justice is the advantage of the stronger immediately calls attention to two difficult questions: (a) the identity of the beneficiaries of justice, that is, the “stronger”;¹⁷ and (b) the related question of precisely *how* justice benefits them. Had Thrasymachos followed the more advisable course of defining justice as the *disadvantage* of the weaker, he would have left himself in a stronger position, by not immediately raising questions (a) and (b). It is not surprising then that Thrasymachos' ablest defenders find themselves—consciously or unconsciously—presenting their accounts of his true position from the point of view of the practitioner of justice.¹⁸

Turning from our hypothetical consistent position to Thrasymachos' actual position, we can identify the difficulties in his arguments. We begin with T3, which, as we have noted, presents a view that is close to the consistent one we have outlined. Its substance is that justice,

16. In addition to Henderson and Sparshott, one could also mention Kerferd and Nicholson.

17. This is the question Socrates immediately raises (338c4–d6).

18. See Henderson, “In Defense of Thrasymachus,” pp. 220, 221, 223, 227; Cross and Wooldley, *Plato's Republic*, pp. 39–41; F. Kerferd (“Doctrine of Thrasymachus,” pp. 26, 23), who has some textual warrant for his assertion, in 338e4 (see below).

obeying the rules and conventions of society, is one's own harm and the advantage of the other fellow, who breaks the rules. In answer to our questions (a) and (b), then, according to T3, the beneficiary of justice is clearly the unjust man who takes advantage, and he is the same as the stronger party in T1; and he benefits by breaking the rules which the just man is naive enough to obey.

Unfortunately for Thrasymachos, T3 is not all he said; and not what he *originally* said. He began with T1—that justice is the advantage of the stronger—and reconciling this alone with T3 forces him to take the awkward step of identifying the just with the “weaker” and the unjust with the “stronger.” But far more damaging is the entire position espoused in T2, which describes justice as obedience to the laws laid down by the rulers. This alone may be consistent with T1, as Thrasymachos says it is, because the rulers are the stronger, and they make laws that promote their own interests. But reconciling T2 and T3 is far more difficult.¹⁹ The difficulties become clear if we concentrate on the two problems we have raised [(a) and (b)].

In regard to (a), while according to T3 the beneficiaries are the breakers, according to T2 they are the *makers* of the rules of justice. This difference alone need not bring Thrasymachos to grief, except for the fact that he presents both T2 and T3 as explications of the single original formula (T1), that justice is the advantage of the stronger. For this commits him to the view that the beneficiaries in T2 and T3, that is, the makers and the breakers of the laws, are the same persons. (Call this view the “identity thesis.”)

The identity thesis is clearly untenable. Counterinstances are not hard to find. To cite an example from the text (343d), business dealings between just and unjust men would undoubtedly redound to the benefit of the unjust (meaning the lawbreakers), while these transactions need have no effect upon the lawmakers. There is no need to adduce other examples; this single instance is enough to refute the identity.

To salvage Thrasymachos' consistency, it is necessary somehow to demonstrate that the breakers and the makers of the laws are the same individuals. Henderson attempts to argue that, according to Thrasymachos, those who are strongest (in the T3 sense, as breakers of the laws) would “usually” or “most likely” end up as rulers of their states—as the stronger in the T2 sense.²⁰ He argues this case on empirical

19. It is clear why Nicholson would wish to argue (on flimsy grounds) that Thrasymachos' position must be read *backwards*, beginning with T3, in light of which T2 must be interpreted and understood (“Unravelling Thrasymachus' Arguments,” pp. 218–219).

20. Henderson, “In Defense of Thrasymachos,” p. 221; see 221–223.

grounds, upon the basis of the facts of political life. But, aside from the fact that we find no hint of such an empirical argument in the text, as Thrasymachos presents his case in T2, the identity of the stronger and the ruler is not a contingent, empirical, truth, but a truth by definition. The ruler is the stronger *because* he rules (*κρατεῖ*).²¹

It should appear that any similar attempt to establish this identity must fail. Thrasymachos could, perhaps, have avoided inconsistency by saying that the beneficiaries of justice are the stronger in *either* sense—either as makers or as breakers of the laws. And so, while it is ill-advised on his part to focus attention upon the identity of the beneficiaries of justice, it seems to be a serious mistake to argue that they are always the stronger and always the same.²²

When we turn to (b), the means through which the beneficiaries profit, we see similar difficulties in the Sophist's overall account, though these seem to stop short of outright inconsistency. The main problem here is that in moving between T2 and T3 Thrasymachos seems to be talking about different things altogether. In the case of T3, his position is clear. In a transaction between a just and an unjust individual, the latter profits from the former's justice, because he is clever enough not to be just, clever enough to break the rules that the just man follows.²³ But the case is more complicated when we turn to T2. The situation envisioned here is not "a joint undertaking" of a just and an unjust man (343d3–6), but rather the relationship between ruler and subject in a political community. According to T2, justice is obedience to the laws laid down by the rulers, which they posit in their own interest. At first sight, according to this view, it appears that the rulers benefit from obedience to the laws, their own obedience included. An act, such as paying a debt, is just or unjust insofar as it is consistent with the prevailing laws, without reference to whether the debt is paid by a subject or a ruler. It is likely that here the rulers profit from justice, because they have rigged the relevant laws in their own favor. Having done this, they can be just and *still* profit. The point that sets this view at odds with T3 is that,

21. Esp. 338e6–339a4 (and 338d10). The meaning of *κρατέω* is a factor here. According to LSJ, it connotes both "to be strong and mighty" and "to rule, hold sway" (q.v.). See Shorey's translation, *Plato: Republic*, 2 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1937, 1935). Grube's translation is somewhat lacking here and seems to leave out the important clause *αὐτῆ δέ που κρατεῖ* in 339a2.

22. Sparshott, one of Thrasymachos' most able defenders, concedes the Sophist's inconsistency here ("Socrates and Thrasymachus," p. 432). Maguire's article is a brilliant analysis of Thrasymachos' equivocal use of the word "stronger" and Plato's motives for this equivocation ("Thrasymachus or Plato").

23. Cf. Henderson, "In Defense of Thrasymachus," p. 220.

according to T2, there is no need for the beneficiary of justice to violate the rules of justice in order to profit.

There are, however, some complicating factors. Kerferd has argued that the question of the rulers' obeying their own laws simply does not arise in Thrasymachos' account of T2. There is textual support for this view, for Thrasymachos does say that the rulers lay down laws and declare that it is "just for their subjects" to abide by them.²⁴ Kerferd's interpretation has the effect of leaving the ruler outside his own laws, and so outside the possibility of being just or unjust.²⁵ But, perhaps, it is sufficient to avoid outright contradiction.

The question of the strict logical consistency of T2 and T3 in regard to question (b) is not worth pursuing at greater length. It is clear, as Maguire has forcefully demonstrated,²⁶ that there is an overall shift in Thrasymachos' argument between the two positions, from a political context in T2 to a moral context in T3. Even if, strictly speaking, it is too strong to say that these positions are "incompatible" in this respect, it is clear that, in order to salvage the Sophist's position, a great deal must be read into the text. Sparshott, for example, chooses to attribute to Thrasymachos the distinctions between four kinds of rules: (i) constitutional laws; (ii) civil and criminal codes; (iii) accepted moral standards or unwritten laws; (iv) "government edicts controlling the day-to-day business of the state."²⁷ But not only are these distinctions not found in the text, it is improbable that Thrasymachos would be able to make them, or to draw out their implications in such a way as to shore up his position. In any event, the question of strict consistency as raised here is not as important as it might be, since his argument fails on other grounds.

We see a crucial defect in Thrasymachos' argument if we backtrack to his initial attempt to define justice. He began by affirming that justice is the advantage of the stronger (T1). Then, to defend this, he launched into a legalistic elaboration in T2. The immediate difficulty here is that T1 and T2 seem to contradict one another. Socrates wastes no time pointing this out (339b7–c8), and Thrasymachos' attempt to circumvent this particular difficulty confronts him with equally serious problems.

The contradiction between T1 and T2 is clear. Considering that rulers do sometime make mistakes concerning their own interests, and that

24. *δίκαιον τοῖς ἀρχομένοις*; 338e; Kerferd, "Doctrine of Thrasymachus," p. 26.

25. As Maguire points out, "Thrasymachus or Plato," pp. 147–148, and 148, n. 20; see above, n. 5.

26. Maguire, "Thrasymachus or Plato."

27. Sparshott, "Socrates and Thrasymachus," p. 426.

these mistakes find their way into the laws, if justice is obedience to the laws laid down by the rulers, it follows that it can be just to do that which is not in the interest of the stronger (that is, of the rulers).

Clitophon tries to resolve this difficulty by suggesting that in T1 Thrasymachos *means* that justice is what the stronger believes to be in his own interest, whether or not it actually is (340b6–8). Thrasymachos rejects this suggestion, and it is curious that he does so.²⁸ For, even though accepting this move would have left him with a position far removed from the consistent position outlined above,²⁹ it would have steered him toward a view that is consistent (assuming that he does not, later, bring up T3), defensible,³⁰ and still in keeping with the kind of “sturdy realistic view” of justice he obviously wishes to present.³¹ Thrasymachos’ failure to follow Clitophon is puzzling, because his alternative ploy (which we can call T2*) leads to a strikingly weak position. And it cannot be argued that he introduces T2* intentionally as a step toward T3, for it is only when Socrates demolishes T2* that he brings up T3 and so again moves to a more interesting, defensible position.

Rejecting Clitophon’s suggestion, Thrasymachos moves to T2* by replying that, strictly speaking (*κατὰ τὸν ἀκριβῆ λόγον*; 304e1–2), the craftsman *qua* craftsman never errs, but makes mistakes only when his knowledge abandons him, that is, when he is no longer, strictly speaking, a craftsman. Thus the ruler, who is tacitly taken to be a craftsman, never errs concerning his own interest *qua* ruler. Thrasymachos is thus able to extricate himself from the contradiction in which he was caught (340d1–341a4).

Though Thrasymachos’ move is sufficient to rescue him from the troubles immediately at hand, as Allan says, it “cannot possibly be of any practical use.”³² First, T2* is inconsistent with his original formu-

28. H. W. B. Joseph, *Essays in Ancient and Modern Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), p. 17, remarks that Clitophon’s suggestion “is in fact precisely what Thrasymachos should have said.” Cross and Woodley agree (*Plato’s Republic*, p. 46), as does Harrison (“Plato’s Manipulation of Thrasymachos,” p. 31).

29. Kerferd has “no doubt” that this is the reason Thrasymachos rejects it (“Doctrine of Thrasymachos,” p. 28).

30. Clitophon’s move would yield a position defensible on empirical grounds, that rulers generally know their own interests (as Hourani points out, “Thrasymachos’ Definition of Justice,” p. 115).

31. Allan, *Republic, Book I*, p. 27.

32. Allan, *Republic, Book I*, p. 27. Thrasymachos’ strategy is defended by Henderson (“In Defense of Thrasymachos,” pp. 224 ff.), Sparshott (“Socrates and Thrasymachos,” pp. 424 ff.), Kerferd (“Doctrine of Thrasymachos,” p. 21).

lation of T2. There he said that obedience to the laws laid down by the rulers was “the identical principle of justice that obtains in all states” (338e6–339a2). In T2*, however, justice consists of obeying only perfect rulers, and, in all probability, these would be found in no states. This is not all. Thrasymachos would be hard pressed to say exactly how one could tell whether a given ruler was or was not perfect, and therefore one to whom obedience would be just.³³ That Socrates does not pursue these lines of attack should not lull the commentator into believing that they do not exist. There are numerous angles from which a view was weak as T2* could be overthrown. The fact that Socrates chooses only one of these is no reason to believe that T2* is acceptable to him in other respects.³⁴

With T2*, Thrasymachos must defend the following position: Justice would exist if there were perfect rulers, (a) who always made laws with a view to their own interests, (b) never mistook their interests, and (c) knew exactly what laws would promote their interests. It does not take a dialectician of Socrates’ skill to demonstrate that this is not an adequate definition of justice. It does not begin to cover the range of behavior that is generally taken to constitute justice. As we have noted, Socrates and Thrasymachos are in general agreement about the kinds of actions that are just. Thus, while paying one’s debts would surely be admitted by Thrasymachos to be just, this action does not necessarily accord with the kind of legislation postulated in T2*. If the presentation of simple counter-instances is enough to force the withdrawal of Laches’ original definition of courage as “staying at one’s post to face the enemy” (*Lach* 190e ff.), or Charmides’ original definition of temperance as a kind of “quietness” (*Charm* 159a ff.), it is clear that similar counterinstances should be enough to dispense with T2*. The first requirement of a Socratic definition is that the definition (definiens) be attributable to the class of entities of which the term itself (definiendum) is predicable.³⁵ Since this is not the case with T2*, there is no *need* for Socrates to attack it by inquiring into the nature of the perfect ruler. That he does so should be attributed to Plato’s literary purposes in the *Republic*.³⁶

33. Cf. Cross and Woosley, *Plato’s Republic*, pp. 47–8.

34. Henderson, for one, is clearly incorrect in his assertion that, because from this point on he speaks only of the ruler in the strict sense, “Socrates accepts Thrasymachos’ answer as satisfactory” (“In Defense of Thrasymachus,” p. 224). Following up the implications of such rulers is only one of the many tacks Socrates could take to overthrow an indefensible position.

35. See Santas, *Socrates*, pp. 109–115.

36. Harrison (“Plato’s Manipulation of Thrasymachus,” p. 31) and Hourani (“Thrasymachos’ Definition of Justice,” p. 115) agree.

It is not necessary to give further evidence of the inadequacy of T2* as a definition of justice. And this is to say nothing of the difficulties that would be encountered in reconciling this view with T3. It seems that the reason Thrasymachos ever adopts this position can be none other than "Plato's manipulation of Thrasymachos."³⁷

I think we now can conclude that while T3 alone comes close to enunciating an illuminating thesis about justice, much of what Thrasymachos says in his other attempted definitions does not rest well with it. At some points there is outright contradiction; at others Thrasymachos seems to be lumping a number of diverse theses which, even if stopping short of inconsistency, do not go well together to form a single view. Finally, T2* posits a generally untenable position, and the very fact that Thrasymachos presents it most probably requires an explanation that goes beyond strictly logical or philosophical considerations.

Having shown that Thrasymachos' collected series of statements are wanting, I shall now attempt to explain why Plato would not be especially concerned with this. My overall thesis is that a number of dialogues depict Socrates engaged in various forms of verbal competition with well-known Sophists, and that in these contexts, considerations of victory can conflict with the participants' desire to formulate philosophically sound arguments. And so our rule of thumb: arguments that seem to be clearly fallacious or otherwise lacking from a logical point of view that are utilized by the participants in these contexts, need not be explained away. They can be accepted at face value, as intentionally fallacious, and this rule holds for Socrates as well as for his interlocutors.

II. Eristic

In *Plato's Use of Fallacy*, Sprague argues that Plato is aware that particular arguments used in the dialogues are fallacious. Her basic contention is that since Plato obviously knows a series of arguments in the *Euthydemus* to be fallacious, when we see similar fallacies employed in other dialogues, we may conclude that Plato knows they are fallacious there also.³⁸ However, Sprague does not discuss her reasons for assuming so readily that Plato knows the arguments in the *Euthydemus* to be

37. To give the title of Harrison's article ("Plato's Manipulation of Thrasy-machos," p. 31); Maguire agrees ("Thrasymachos or Plato," pp. 145–146). The precise nature of this manipulation is explored below.

38. R. K. Sprague, *Plato's Use of Fallacy* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1962), p. xii, cf. R. Robinson, "Plato's Consciousness of Fallacy," in *Essays on Greek Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

fallacious. Aside from the fact that some of the arguments are so outrageous as to leave little doubt—for example, you have a dog; the dog is a father; the dog is yours; so the dog is your father (298e)—one main reason for believing that Plato is intentionally using fallacies in the *Euthydemus* is the dramatic context in which they occur. In the *Euthydemus* Plato depicts a recognizable dramatic situation, an eristic match, in which sophistry was routinely used.

My central contention here is that the *Euthydemus* is not alone among the dialogues in portraying this kind of situation.³⁹ In fact, I will demonstrate that the debate between Socrates and Thrasymachos in *Republic* I is much closer to the *Euthydemus* than is generally recognized.

In the *Theaetetus*, Plato distinguishes two kinds of dialogue: a debate, in which the participants argue contentiously (*ἀγωνιζόμενος*), and a conversation, in which they behave more cooperatively (*διαλεγόμενος*) (167e4–5). Plato says: “A debate need not be taken seriously and one may trip up an opponent to the best of one’s power,⁴⁰ but a conversation should be taken in earnest; one should help out the other party and bring home to him only those slips and fallacies (*σφάλματα*) that are due to himself or to his earlier instructors.” (167e–168a; Cornford, tr.) We find a similar distinction in the *Meno*:

and if my questioner were a professor of the eristic and contentious sort (*σοφῶν . . . ἐριστικῶν τε καὶ ἀγωνιστικῶν*), I should say to him; I have made my statement; if it is wrong, your business is to examine and refute it. But if, like you and me on this occasion, we were friends and chose to have a discussion together (*διαλέγεσθαι*), I should have to reply in some milder tone more suited to dialectic (*διαλεκτικώτερον*). (75c8–d4).

And, in the *Republic*:

What a grand thing . . . is the power of the art of contradiction *τῆς ἀντιλογικῆς τέχνης*)?

Why so?

Because . . . many appear to me to fall into it even against their wills, and to suppose that they are not wrangling but arguing (*οὐκ ἐρίζειν ἀλλὰ διαλέγεσθαι*), owing to their inability to apply the proper

39. According to one traditional classification of the dialogues, preserved in Diogenes Laertius (3.49–51), the *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Hippias Major* and *Hippias Minor*, were grouped with the *Euthydemus* under the heading *agonistikos*; to this list I would add *Republic* I (without, however, implying that it was ever written as an independent dialogue).

40. *ἐν μὲν τῷ παιζῆι τε καὶ σδᾶλλῃ καθ ὅσον ἀν δύνηται* (167e5–6).

divisions and distinctions to the subject under consideration. They pursue verbal oppositions, practicing eristic, not dialectic (ἐριδι οὐ διαλέκτω) on one another. (454a)

A similar distinction (call it the “eristic distinction”) appears in at least four other places in the dialogues, and can be found in works of Aristotle as well.⁴¹ The language used in these passages strongly indicates that, *as a matter of course, Plato (and Aristotle) distinguished between two kinds of discussions, the cooperative and the contentious (or the debate), and that both believed that, in the debate fallacies were used, also as a matter of course.*

I do not think it is possible to elucidate that nature of contentious argument in any great detail. The necessary evidence has not survived.⁴² However, there is sufficient evidence to establish a few general points, which are all that the argument here requires.

First, it is clear that Plato was aware of question and answer argument practiced as a competitive sport. The eristic distinction is undoubtedly an allusion to this practice, and it would have been so regarded by the audience for which Plato wrote. This practice, which Aristotle calls dialectic,⁴³ and to recommendations for the practitioner of which he devotes the *Topica* and *Sophistici Elenchi*, is conducted as follows. The match presupposes two contestants, a questioner and an answerer, and a given problem or thesis. Ideally, the thesis would be a statement, often

41. See *Tht* 164c–d; *Phlb* 17a; *Rep* 539c; *Tim* 88a; from Aristotle, *Topica*: 159a26–32, 161a23–24; *Sophistici Elenchi* 182b33–35. Many other passages from Aristotle could be cited to confirm this general distinction.

42. Our most important evidence is undoubtedly the *Topica* and *Sophistici Elenchi*. On Book VIII of the *Topica*, see P. Moraux's indispensable analysis, “La joute dialectique d'après le huitième livre des *Topiques*,” in *Aristotle on Dialectic: The Topics, Proceedings of the Third Symposium Aristotelicum*, G. E. L. Owen, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968). See also E. Weil, “The Place of Logic in Aristotle's Thought,” in *Articles on Aristotle, Volume I: Science*, J. Barnes, et al., eds., trans. by the editors (London: Duckworth, 1975); and E. Kapp, “Syllogistic,” in *Articles on Aristotle*, Vol. I, trans. by the editors. For additional evidence, see G. Ryle, *Plato's Progress* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), ch. IV. For an analysis of the *Euthydemus* and its connections with this overall context, see H. Keulen, *Untersuchungen zu Platons Euthydem* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1971). For the history of eristic, see Ryle, pp. 110–126; Moraux, pp. 291–300; Keulen, pp. 77–90; W. and M. Kneale, *The Development of Logic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), ch. I; and P. Wilpert, “Aristoteles und die Dialektik,” *Kantstudien* 48 (1956–57).

43. For the differences between the Aristotelian and Platonic conceptions of dialectic, see G. Grote, *Aristotle*, 2d ed. (London: John Murray, 1880; reprint ed. New York: Arno Press, 1973), pp. 263–267; Moraux, “La joute dialectique,” pp. 307–311.

the view of some noted intellectual, that is contrary to received opinion; in practice, however, any assertion will do, as long as defensible cases can be made both for it and against it (*Top* 104b19–36). The answerer chooses one position as his thesis, and his job is to defend it against the questioner, who attempts to force upon him a countersyllogism, a chain of argument, the conclusion of which contradicts his original thesis. Should the questioner manage to complete such an argument, he wins. He pursues this aim through a series of questions, generally in the form of yes-or-no or either-or. The answerer, who is required to respond with a certain amount of good faith, attempts to prevent the questioner from completing the countersyllogism, by finding exceptions and counterinstances to his arguments. If he is able to do this, he wins. These contests seem to presuppose an audience, which has some sort of an officiating function. They have other features which can be pieced together from our sources, especially the *Topica* and *Sophistici Elenchi*.⁴⁴

The casual manner in which Plato and Aristotle refer to this sport indicates that competitive debating was a developed, widely practiced activity. Besides Aristotle, a number of Plato's other contemporaries and near-contemporaries wrote guidebooks for the dialectical competitor,⁴⁵ and Plato is aware that particular individuals had great reputations for dialectical prowess. The most obvious examples are Euthydemus and Dionysodorus in the *Euthydemus*, who claim to be able to refute any position, true or false (*Euthd* 272a–b), but similar figures crop up in all sorts of places. For instance, the central argument of the *Sophist*, in which Plato solves some major eristic puzzles, is dramatized as a duel between the Eleatic Stranger⁴⁶ and an imaginary *eristikos*, who puts up a fierce struggle before he is finally refuted.⁴⁷ There can be no doubt that the *Euthydemus* depicts a dialectical competition, and there is strong evidence that the *Protagoras* depicts something along similar lines.⁴⁸

From Aristotle's account we gather that dialectic was a complex enterprise with a number of different forms, utilized in the pursuit of

44. For accounts of the match, see Moraux, "La joute dialectique," pp. 277–287; Ryle, *Plato's Progress*, pp. 104–105.

45. For example: Protagoras (D.L. 9.55); Antisthenes (D.L. 6.16); Theophrastus (D.L. 5.42). The *Dissoi Logoi* appears to be some sort of similar teaching manual. Cf. *SE* 183b15 ff.

46. The Eleatic Stranger is presented to the reader as not a *theos* . . . *elenktikos* (216b), and as "more reasonable than those who devote themselves to disputation" (216b).

47. For example, see *Sph* 239b–c, 239e–240a, 241a, 241b, 260d–e; this is a common theme in many dialogues. Cf. *Crat* 421d8, 430d1–2, 431a8, 433c8.

48. See my paper, "Toward a Consistent Interpretation of the *Protagoras*."

different ends. He describes four basic forms: didactic, gymnastic (*gumnastike*), examination (*peirastike*), and contentious (*eristike* or *agonistike*).⁴⁹ The classification of kinds of discussions in Plato is less elaborate. It does not appear that Plato goes beyond the basic distinction we have seen above between cooperative and contentious discussions, that is the eristic distinction.

Plato makes this distinction on two grounds, either of which is enough to move a discussion onto the contentious side. Contentious and cooperative discussions (a) embody different attitudes and (b) utilize different kinds of arguments. With regard to attitude, eristic is distinct from dialectic in its lack of philosophical seriousness. Practitioners of this activity treat it as a game;⁵⁰ they argue for victory, rather than to establish the truth;⁵¹ and, in the process, they are harsh and uncooperative towards their opponents.⁵² As expected, cooperative dialectic is the opposite on all these counts.

Eristic is also different in its use of sophistry. Not only is this stated explicitly in *Theaetetus* 167e, but Plato remarks that the failure to apply proper divisions and distinctions is enough to transform a philosophical discussion into a contentious one.⁵³ What is more, he suggests that the very employment of purely verbal arguments is sufficient to move a discussion from dialectic to eristic even if the participants do not realize that they are using them.⁵⁴ Thus, for Plato, there are serious, cooperative discussions, aimed at the truth, and nonsensical, contentious ones, aimed at victory. The difference in attitude seems to me to be the more important one, for where victory is the goal fallacious arguments are employed as a matter of course, while even the inadvertent use of fallacies can merely make it seem that one is competing. In any event, like Aristotle, Plato sees fallacy as a regular component of the *agon logon*.⁵⁵

49. *SE* 165a38 ff.; Moraux, "La joute dialectique," pp. 287–90; for problems in Aristotle's classification, see Grote, *Aristotle*, pp. 393–403.

50. *Tht* 167e–168a; *Rep* 539c; *Euthd*, passim (esp. 275e–278c).

51. *Tht* 164c–d; *Phdo* 91a.

52. See *Meno* 75c–d; *Tht* 168a–b; *Prt* 337a–b, 336a–b.

53. See *Phlb* 17a; *Rep* 454a.

54. *Rep* 454a–b; here Socrates remarks that he and his fellow discussants are "unawares slipping into contentiousness" at that very moment.

55. It appears to be a basic feature of the *agon logon*, as encountered in various literary genres, that the participants are permitted—even expected—to resort to any means in order to win. See J. Duchemin, *L'Agon dans la tragédie grecque* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1945), pp. 206–209; and see Part I, 11–37.

III. The *Agon Logon* in *Republic I*

Great strides have been made in recent years in understanding puzzling aspects of Aristotle's logical works through the realization of their close connection with competitive debating.⁵⁶ Certain scholars writing in this area also note the potential importance of a similar connection in the case of Plato,⁵⁷ though this does not necessarily imply that the competitive dialectic Plato had in mind was as completely formalized as that described by Aristotle. Nevertheless, there is strong evidence that the debate between Socrates and Thrasymachos is closely connected with this activity, that it *is* in fact a more or less formal, organized competition.

In this section I will demonstrate that the rules and conventions of the debate are similar to those of the competitive dialectic described by Aristotle. We will also see that the discussion is not only organized dialectic but contentious as well. This is clear in both of the above respects. The attitude of Thrasymachos is unmistakably hostile and competitive, and that of Socrates, while not easy to gauge, can be deduced from the calibre of his arguments. Thrasymachos repeatedly voices the suspicion that Socrates will use sophistry against him, an expectation which is not disappointed. In light of Thrasymachos' suspicions, the fallaciousness of Socrates' subsequent arguments must be viewed as intentional on Plato's part. And so Socrates' argumentation as well as Thrasymachos' helps us to determine the nature of the discussion.

Beginning with Thrasymachos' attitude, it is clear that Plato wishes to depict him as harsh and rude—as the “fierce fighter,” which is the literal translation of his name. This is apparent in many dramatic details. Most important from our point of view is his suspicion that Socrates will use fallacious arguments against him (338d, 340d, 341a–b, 341c). He thinks Socrates will stop at nothing to win their debate and dares him to try:

You think [Socrates says] that it was with malice aforethought and trying to get the better of you unfairly that I asked that question?

I don't think it, I know it, he said, and you won't make anything by it, for you won't get the better of me by stealth and, failing stealth, you are not of the force to beat me in debate. (341a–b)

56. See esp. Weil, “The Place of Logic”; “Kapp, “Syllogistic.” Cf. G. E. L. Owen, “Dialectic and Eristic in the Treatment of the Forms,” in Owen, ed., *Aristotle on Dialectic*.

57. See esp. Weil, “The Place of Logic,” pp. 102–103.

22 Thrasymachos' *Eristikos*

Now bring against this your cavils and your shyster's tricks if you are able. [Thrasymachos says] I ask no quarter. But you'll find yourself unable.

Why do you suppose, I said, that I am so mad as to try to bear the lion and try the pettifogger on Thrasymachos?

You did try it just now, he said, paltry fellow though you be. (341b–c)

As we have said, the rules and conventions of the debate are those of competitive dialectic. The evidence of this must be examined with care. To begin with, this debate like other competitive discussions depicted by Plato is conducted publicly, though before a rather small audience, at the home of Polemarchos. Like most of Socrates' opponents in similar debates, Thrasymachos is a Sophist and teacher of rhetoric, who would like to use the debate as an opportunity to show off (esp. 338a5–7). In fact, Sophist to the core, Thrasymachos manages before beginning the debate to lay some sort of cash wager upon its outcome (337d).

The conventions of the debate are those of a disputation. Thrasymachos originally breaks into the discussion protesting against the way Socrates has been conducting it, accusing him of showing off by refuting the answers others give, while refusing to give an answer himself, because it is easier to ask questions than to answer them (336b8–c5). And he demands that Socrates give an answer (336c5–6). What follows is a fairly involved wrangle—in which Thrasymachos repeats his accusation two more times⁵⁸—before he can be convinced to assume the role of respondent.⁵⁹ Though he pretends to be intent on winning his point that Socrates should be the respondent,⁶⁰ Thrasymachos believes he has a wonderful answer to give and, desiring to win the admiration of the company, gives in and agrees to answer (338a5–b3). What is

58. 337a5–7, 337e1–3 (also 338b1–3); it should be noted that the strategy Thrasymachos accuses Socrates of using is a standard sophistic procedure; see *SE* 172b21–4.

59. We see similar wrangles concerning the roles of answerer and questioner in the *Protagoras* (338c–e, 348a–c, 347b); the *Gorgias* (461e–462b, 474b–c); and the *Euthydemus* (esp. 287b–d). We have a very similar wrangle in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* 4.4.9. The situation here is a discussion with a Sophist (Hippias), about the nature of justice. What is striking is that Hippias too accuses Socrates of questioning others all the time, while being unwilling to give an account (*ὑπέχειν λόγον*) himself. *ὑπέχειν λόγον* seems to be the standard dialectical term for maintaining a position in the role of answerer (see *Top* 159a38, 158a31; *Euthd* 285e7; *Pr* 338d5). The subsequent discussion, however, is not conducted as a dialectical interrogation (perhaps for reasons suggested by Ryle, *Plato's Progress*, pp. 121–122).

60. *προσποικεῖτο δὲ φιλονικεῖν πρὸς τὸ ἐμὲ εἶναι τὸν ἀποκρινόμενον*, 338a7–8.

clear from this entire exchange is that Thrasymachos and Socrates are not merely beginning a discussion of justice; they are vying for roles in an organized activity.

Powerful evidence that the discussion is an organized competition is the fact that at one point the procedures for conducting and judging it are explicitly discussed by Socrates and Glaucon. It is decided to conduct the debate dialectically, rather than to use the method of opposing speeches:

If we oppose him in a set speech (*ἀντικατατείναντες λέγωμεν αὐτῷ λόγον παρὰ λόγον*)⁶¹ enumerating in turn the advantages of being just and he replies and we rejoin, we shall have to count up and measure the goods listed in the respective speeches and we shall forthwith be in need of judges to decide between us. But if, as in the preceding discussion, we come to terms with one another as to what we admit in the inquiry, we shall ourselves be both judges and pleaders. (348a–b)

Note that in the above passage it is decided to utilize the method of question and answer “as in the preceding discussion” (*ὡσπερ ἄρτι*; 348b3)—that is, up to the overthrow of T3.⁶² This is unassailable evidence that the preceding discussion was indeed conducted according to the rules and conventions of the method of question and answer, as also seen in other works.

The eristic nature of the debate is seen in a number of relatively minor details listed below:

i) Once Thrasymachos has presented his initial thesis—which undoubtedly should be taken as a thesis in the strict sense, a view that flies in the face of received opinion—Socrates develops a counter-argument. Thrasymachos’ reply, *τί λέγεις σὺ*; (339d4), is a favorite eristic formula,⁶³ and when the contradiction between T1 and T2 develops, Polemarchos and Clitophon, apparently acting as opposing seconds, retrace and discuss it.⁶⁴

61. Cf. *Hp Mi* 369c.

62. The contrast between the method of opposing speeches and the method of dialectic—which this passage must be read as referring to—is given explicitly in the *Theaetetus* (167d–e; also 166a, 168e); cf. *Hp Mi* 369b–c; *Prt* 334e–335c, 348a; *Grg* 471e.

63. J. Adam, *The Republic of Plato*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), ad loc.; see Aristophanes’ *Clouds* 1174; cf. Shorey, *Republic*, ad loc.; K. Dover, *Aristophanes: Clouds* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), on 1174.

64. That there were seconds at dialectical contests is clear from the *Euthydemus*; see 276b–d, 277c–d, etc. Cf. *Grg* 447c–448d, 461b–d.

ii) As Socrates attacks Thrasy-machos' new position, T2*, the Sophist resists the course of the discussion (342c10, 342d2–3). Plato's depiction of the ensuing exchange, again, allows us to see the conventions of dialectic:

Thrasymachos, instead of replying, said, Tell me Socrates, have you got a nurse?

What do you mean? said I. Why didn't you answer me instead of asking such a question? (343a)

By not replying, Thrasy-machos is clearly violating the rules of the discussion.

iii) The contrast between the two methods of discussion is referred to again at 350d–e. Here Thrasy-machos attempts to hide behind the conventions of question and answer debate, by declaring that he could answer Socrates' arguments, but that this would entail a lengthy speech, which is forbidden by the rules. He uses this excuse to detach himself from the thesis being examined.

iv) Proof that the situation here is far removed from a typical Socratic *elenchos* is the fact that Thrasy-machos does dissociate himself from the view being examined. Twice he asserts that he will give answers that do not necessarily correspond to his true opinions (349a9–10, 350d9–e10). Whereas a key feature of the *elenchos* is that the respondent must answer according to his true convictions,⁶⁵ dialectical disputation allows the espousal of positions the contestants do not actually hold (*Top* 160b21–22; 159a20–25). And Thrasy-machos attempts to steer the debate in the direction of an examination of his thesis, rather than of himself (349a9–10).

v) The rules of dialectic are also seen in Thrasy-machos' eventual agreement to continue to answer Socrates' questions, but in a purely *pro forma* fashion—to “nod assent and dissent” (350e3–4). Clearly, this is to complete his role in the discussion, according to the conventions of question and answer debate.⁶⁶

Our final piece of evidence concerns the nature of the arguments used by Socrates. We have seen that Thrasy-machos expects Socrates to use sophistry and dares him to try. His suspicions are more than confirmed, for a number of the arguments Socrates employs against him are glaringly fallacious. These fallacies have been carefully analyzed by previous

65. For example, *Crito* 49d; *Lach* 193c; *Meno* 83d; *Alcibiades I* 110a. It should be noted that Socrates does attempt to get Thrasy-machos to answer in this fashion (349a4–10), though without success. The important point is that this failure does not preclude further discussion.

66. Cf. *Grg* 505c ff.

commentators,⁶⁷ and so they need not be examined here in detail. But we must look briefly at the three most striking examples.

a) The argument against T2 (341c4–342e11), which is intended to prove, by analogy with other craftsmen, that the ruler in the strict sense would rule in the interest of his subjects, is hopelessly weak. It rests on an illicit generalization.⁶⁸ Socrates' preferred examples, the doctor and the pilot (341d, 342c, 342d–e, 346a–b) are special cases. They have human subjects and provide services for them. The architect's art, mentioned a bit later (346d), also shares these two key features. Other arts, however, do not. Many arts could be named which do not work for the good of their subjects, for instance, the strangler's art, the thief's art. In others, the subject could hardly be thought to have a good, as with the sculptor's or the astronomer's art. In still others, the subject is difficult to identify, for example, the tennis player's art (is it the racket? the ball? the game? the opponent? the fans? oneself, the prize money?) Despite Socrates' assertion to the contrary, one of the arts he names does not seem to fit his own specifications. Horsemanship (ἑπικλή; 342c4) would surely be conducted with an eye to the benefit of the rider, not the horse, were their interests not to coincide.

After Thrasymachos strikes back with a valid counter-example, the shepherd, Socrates is far from proving his initial point by distinguishing the art proper from its money-making component (345b9–347a6). This distinction is useful to Socrates only in regard to those arts that are designed to provide services for human subjects. As we have seen, all arts are not of this sort, and the distinction cannot transform arts that are not concerned with the good of their subjects into arts that are. Socrates gives no other argument for his desired conclusion, that the art of ruling belongs to the service class, and so he has no warrant to assimilate ruling to the doctor's art rather than to that of the strangler or that of the ruthless shepherd.

b) The argument to prove that the just man is wise and good, the unjust ignorant and bad, again on the analogy of the craftsman (349b2–350d11),⁶⁹ has two glaring flaws. First, it utilizes a clear and obvious equivocation concerning the verb *πλεονεκτεῖν*, which can mean both “to

67. See especially Cross and Woosley, *Plato's Republic*, pp. 48–60; Sparshott, “Socrates and Thrasymachus,” pp. 434–453; J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 50–56.

68. Cross and Woosley, *Plato's Republic*, pp. 48–51; Sparshott, “Socrates and Thrasymachus,” pp. 434–439; Henderson, “In Defense of Thrasymachus,” pp. 224–227.

69. See Cross and Woosley, *Plato's Republic*, pp. 51–55; Sparshott, “Socrates and Thrasymachus,” pp. 443–445.

do better than” and “to take advantage of.” Because the unjust man would wish *to take advantage* of both just and unjust men, Socrates is able to equivocate and argue that he wishes *to do better than* both just and unjust men. Since to wish to do better than an expert, whose performance cannot be bettered, is a sign of ignorance, the unjust man is ignorant. Second, as Cross and Woozley point out,⁷⁰ Socrates' assumption that the unjust man is a poor practitioner of the craft of justice, rather than a potentially consummate master of the rather different craft of injustice, is neither argued for nor justified. Indeed, resuming Thrasymachos' case in Book II, Glaucon gives us an unjust man who is a master practitioner of his nefarious art. Thus the portrayal of injustice as incompetence (that is, failure at the art of being just), which is central to Socrates' argument, is not established.

c) The most glaring flaw in the argument from function (352d8–354a9)⁷¹ is, again, a simple equivocation. Leaving aside the relatively complex difficulties in Socrates' account of exactly what a function is,⁷² it is clear that Socrates equivocates with the term, *ψυχή*. In one sense, its connotations center around biological life. In this sense, the *psyche* is that which separates a living organism from inert matter, and in this sense, its function need not have any bearing on living *morally*; biological life exhausts its necessary *content*.⁷³ Socrates equivocates in his treatment of Thrasymachos' admission that justice is the virtue of the *psyche*. For the *psyche*, this is so if we take *psyche* in quite a different sense—that is, as the seat of the moral personality.⁷⁴ Thus it is by oscillating between these two senses that Socrates is able to argue that justice is necessary for *living* well. Moreover, Socrates completes his argument only through recourse to an obvious manipulation of the adverb, *eu*, which enables him to move from “the just man lives well” (εὖ ζῶν) to “the just man is blessed and happy” (μακάριός τε καὶ εὐδαίμων) (354a1–2). Whereas this last fallacy is both transparently simple and a common Socratic move,⁷⁵ the manipulation of the concept of *psyche* is more subtle. As Cross and Woozley say, Thrasymachos should have thought

70. Cross and Woozley, *Plato's Republic*, pp. 52–53; also Annas, *Introduction*, pp. 51–52.

71. See Cross and Woozley, *Plato's Republic*, pp. 56–60; Sparshott, “Socrates and Thrasymachus,” pp. 451–453.

72. See Cross and Woozley, *Plato's Republic*, p. 58.

73. τὸ ζῆν, 353d9.

74. Many commentators note this: e.g., Sparshott, “Socrates and Thrasymachus,” p. 452; Allan, *Republic, Book I*, on 353d10; Shorey, *Republic, I*, 100 note e; cf. Adam, *Republic*, on 353e.

75. E.g., *Chrm* 172a1–3; *Grg* 507c3–5.

more deeply before assenting to the proposition that justice is the virtue of the *psyche*.⁷⁶ There was nothing in Socrates' argument to justify this inference.

Thus we see that at least three of the arguments utilized by Socrates are fallacious. It is of the greatest importance to note the situation in which they are employed, namely, the dialectical competition in which Socrates and Thrasymachos are engaged. Consider also that those present at the competition are not fooled by Socrates' arguments, nor do they censure him for using them. Rather, Book II opens with Glaucon remarking that Thrasymachos gave up too easily, charmed by Socrates like a serpent by a snake charmer (358b), and he proceeds to reopen the questions pursued earlier.⁷⁷

I think it is clear that the fallacious arguments utilized by Socrates in *Republic I* are eristic arguments, employed in an eristic context.

IV. Conclusion

In concluding, it may be useful briefly to discuss some problems raised by my thesis. The most pressing question is why Plato would wish to open the *Republic* by depicting an eristic match between Thrasymachos and Socrates. However, even if a satisfactory answer to this difficult question could be provided, it would of necessity be lengthy and complex, which space here will not allow. But the question *whether* Plato depicts such an encounter in *Republic I* is distinct from the question *why* he does so, and my argument above that he does so is not dependent on the brief account I will give of his motives.

While it is always difficult to explain an author's intentions—especially one who wrote over two thousand years ago—and the state of the evidence makes firm conclusions impossible, I suggest that Plato's motives are linked to historical factors. The key factor is the importance of competitive dialectic. Available evidence indicates that this practice was not only widespread but was also important to philosophy as conducted during Plato's time. In a source such as Diogenes Laertius, many of the philosophers discussed are portrayed as engaged in this activity, and there is evidence that Socrates was an important figure in its development.⁷⁸ We may say then that Plato frequently portrays Socrates as

76. Cross and Woosley, *Plato's Republic*, pp. 58–59; also Annas, *Introduction*, p. 55.

77. Note also the remarks of Adeimantus at 487b–d.

78. See esp. D.L. 9.53; see also the stimulating—though undoubtedly overstated—thesis of H. Sidgwick, "The Sophists," *Journal of Philology* 4 (1872):298ff., esp. 300–301.

engaged in competitive dialectic, because it is an activity in which the Socrates Plato knew often took part. Considering that this activity was established, with important philosophical uses and benefits, there is no reason to condemn Socrates for taking part in it. Those who shrink from this conclusion because it would seem to put Socrates on a level with such of his sophistic opponents as Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, should remember that Socrates did *more* than this. He could play sophist with sophists, but there was also a serious side to his teaching, which these other figures lacked.⁷⁹

It is also clear that such a debate plays a useful role in the structure of the *Republic* as a whole. As many authorities have argued, one major purpose of Book I is to raise themes dealt with later in the work.⁸⁰ If this is true, Plato does not *have* to depict Thrasymachos as a powerful philosophical thinker, with a startlingly original, fully worked out doctrine of justice. What is best in Thrasymachos' jumbled view can be left for Glaucon to resuscitate for purposes of discussion in Book II. Similarly, though the arguments with which Socrates batters Thrasymachos into silence are generally fallacious—and, as I have argued, intentionally so—they serve admirably to raise many subsequent themes of the work. The eristic contest also plays an important dramatic role. Between this debate in Book I and the discussion that dominates the subsequent Books, the conversation changes from competitive dialectic to cooperative dialectic,⁸¹ while in the case of competitive dialectic at least, the discussion is to some extent formalized within a network of accepted rules and conventions, which explain the nature of the arguments employed.

In closing I should add that it is not my intention to suggest that Thrasymachos' doctrine of justice is unworthy of study. We have seen that there is a philosophically interesting account of justice lying behind Thrasymachos' arguments. Although he is unable either to present it consistently or to defend it adequately, it can be reconstructed and examined. But it bears repeating that this "consistent position" is not what Thrasymachos is actually shown as holding. As Plato playfully, ironically, uses the often farcical eristic of the *Euthydemus* to hint at

79. See Sprague, "Plato's Sophistry," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume* 51 (1977): esp. 59–60.

80. See, e.g., N. White, *A Companion to Plato's Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1979), pp. 61–73; A. E. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and His Work*, 6th ed. (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., Meridian Books: 1956), pp. 266–270.

81. A good discussion of this is found in C. Gill, *Plato's Use of Characters in His Dialogues* (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1970), pp. 59–61.

some of the deepest truths in Platonic philosophy,⁸² as he uses Socrates' series of fallacious arguments in the *Protagoras* to allow a glimpse at the unity of the virtues—and as he uses Socrates' fallacious arguments in *Republic* I to unveil fundamental themes of the later Books—he uses Thrasymachos' series of arguments to present variations on a shocking, Sophistical doctrine of justice. But Plato's method here, a peculiar ironic transparency that is all his own, is more poetry than philosophy. Plato reserves the completely serious statement of philosophical views—both his own and those of his opponents—for contexts outside the purview of contentious dialectic.⁸³

82. See Friedlander, *Plato*, II, 191–193; Keulen, who is influenced by Friedlander (*Untersuchungen*, p. 5), makes this one focus of his book.

83. Note on texts and translations used. Plato is quoted from the standard edition, that of J. Burnet, *Platonis Opera*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1900–07). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are from Loeb Classics Library editions, occasionally modified slightly. Thus I use Shorey's translation of the *Republic*.