

Plato's *Laws*

Book 3

Translated by David Horan

Persons in the dialogue: Athenian Stranger, Cleinias, Megillus

Athenian Stranger: ^{676A} So let's leave this issue, then. But what is the origin of a political system?¹ What should we say? Wouldn't this be appreciated most easily, and in the best way, from the following perspective?

Cleinias: From what perspective?

Ath: The perspective from which we should always observe the progress and transformation of cities in the direction of excellence or evil.

Cle: What perspective do you mean?

Ath: The perspective, I believe, of a vast and limitless span of time and of the changes ^{676B} that occur within it.

Cle: In what way?

Ath: Come on now, for a very long time there have been cities, and people have lived as citizens. Do you think we could ever discern for how long this has been so?

Cle: That would not be at all easy.

Ath: Well at any rate the time period would be immense and enormous.

Cle: That is certainly so.

Ath: Haven't thousands upon thousands of cities come into existence over that time period and, by the same reckoning, ^{676C} haven't just as many of them perished, and haven't they each been governed at one time or another by all sorts of political systems? Sometimes a large city has arisen from a small one, and at other times a small one from a large one, better has arisen from worse, and worse from better.

Cle: Inevitably.

Ath: Then let's discover the cause of this transformation, if we are able, for that might perhaps reveal to us how political systems come into existence in the first place and how they change.

Cle: Well said, so we should get on with it, you to explain what you have in mind on these matters, and the two of us to follow along.

Ath: ^{677A} Well then, do the ancient accounts seem to you to possess any degree of truth?

¹ In general, the Greek word *Politeia* has been translated throughout as "political system". It could also be translated as constitution. The title in Greek of Plato's *Republic* is [The] *Politeia*. The English word "polity" is an anglicisation of the word *politeia*.

Cle: Which ones?

Ath: Those saying that humanity has been destroyed many times by floods, plagues, and lots of other disasters, after which only a small remnant of the human race was left.

Cle: Yes indeed, everyone finds a story like this convincing.

Ath: Come on then, let's think about one of these many destructions, the one that happened once because of the flood.²

Cle: What line of thought do you want us to pursue?

Ath: ^{677B} That those who escaped the destruction at the time would almost all be mountain dwelling shepherds, I presume; little embers of the human race, surviving among the high mountain peaks.

Cle: Of course.

Ath: And indeed, men like this, necessarily, lack experience in the other skills, and especially in the devices employed against one another by city dwellers to further their greed and ambition and any other foul deeds they decide to inflict on one another.

Cle: Quite likely.

Ath: ^{677C} Now, may we assume that the cities situated on the plains or by the sea were destroyed totally at the time.

Cle: We may.

Ath: Wouldn't all their tools be destroyed too, and if some significant skill in the realm of politics or any other branch of wisdom had been discovered, shall we say that all these also disappeared at the time? For, best of men, if these inventions had remained, all the while, as undisturbed as they are now, how would anything new ever have been discovered?

Cle: ^{677D} This means that for countless ages these matters were unknown to people at that time, but in the past thousand or two thousand years, some have been revealed to Daedalus, others to Orpheus or Palamedes, matters musical to Marsyas and Olympus, the lyre to Amphion, and lots of other matters to various others, all, so to speak, just yesterday or the day before.³

Ath: It's good of you, Cleinias, to omit mention of your acquaintance who was, literally, a man of just yesterday.

Cle: You mean Epimenides, don't you?⁴

² This is "the flood in the age of Deucalion" (Apol. I.vii.2), a Greek version of the Great Flood. Deucalion and his wife Pyrrha, whose ark came to rest on Mount Parnassus, were the only survivors.

³ Daedalus, an inventor, master-craftsman, and the inventor of images constructed the Labyrinth, (Apol. III.xv.8). Orpheus founded the mysteries of Dionysus (Apol. I.iii.2). His singing charmed the whole of nature. Palamedes was credited with inventing, "number and calculation" (*Rep.* VII 522c-d), writing, weights and measures, and military tactics. Marsyas and Olympus were both musicians who played the double-pipe (aulos). Amphion was a brilliant lyre player.

⁴ See *Laws* Book I.642D-E. Epimenides was a Cretan wise man about whom there were many legends and miraculous tales.

Ath: Yes, the very man. Indeed he far surpassed every one of you with his invention, my friend. Hesiod had an intuition about it⁵, in theory, long before, but this man realised it, in action, as you people say.

Cle: Yes, that's what we say.

Ath: Should we say that the situation for the human race, after the destruction occurred, was as follows? In spite of the terrible and widespread desolation there was still a vast expanse of available land, and although most other living creatures had disappeared, some herds of cattle, and perhaps some goats, happened to survive, and these initially provided ^{678A} some meagre sustenance at the time.

Cle: Indeed.

Ath: Now our present argument has dealt with cities, political systems and legislation. Do you think there would, in any sense, have been any memory of these at all?

Cle: Not at all.

Ath: Now, it is from those people, living under such circumstances, isn't it, that everything we have nowadays, has arisen: our cities, our political systems, our skills and our laws, a lot of degeneracy and a great deal of excellence too?

Cle: How do you mean?

Ath: ^{678B} Do we imagine, my good man, that the people of that time, with no experience of all the good associated with city life, or the many evils either, were ever completely excellent or completely evil?

Cle: A good question, yes, we now understand the point you are making.

Ath: But with the passage of time, and the multiplication of our race, everything eventually came to be as everything is now.

Cle: Correct.

Ath: But this, in all likelihood did not happen suddenly, but gradually over an enormous span of time.

Cle: ^{678C} Most likely indeed.

Ath: Yes, for they were all, I imagine, haunted still by the fear of coming down from the high places to the plains.

Cle: Of course.

Ath: Now although they were always glad to see one another in those days, because there were so few of them, any means of transportation, by land or by sea, to visit one another had, for the most part, all perished, so to speak, along with the relevant skills. So I don't think they found it at all easy to get together. For iron and bronze ^{678D} and all other metals had disappeared in the flood, and there were no means at all of extracting such materials from the earth, and consequently, there was

⁵ *Works and Days* 40ff. Hesiod's allusion to the "great virtue in mallow and asphodel" is supposed to have suggested to Epimenides his "inventions" of a herbal concoction or "elixir of life". Bury, Loeb 169.

a shortage of timber. Indeed any tools that had survived in the mountains were quickly worn out and disappeared, never to reappear until the skill of working with metal had been restored to humanity.

Cle: Indeed, how could they have tools?

Ath: How many generations later do you think this happened?

Cle: ^{678E} Very many, of course.

Ath: And wouldn't any skills that required iron and bronze, and anything of that sort, also have disappeared for the same amount of time or even longer?

Cle: Indeed.

Ath: Then civil strife and warfare too, disappeared at the time, for a variety of reasons.

Cle: How so?

Ath: In the first place, they were kind, and had a friendly disposition towards one another because of their isolation, and what's more, food was not a matter of contention for them. ^{679A} For there was no shortage of pastureland except perhaps in some cases, initially, and most of them lived off this at the time. Indeed they were not at all lacking in milk or in meat and they provided plenty more wholesome food for themselves by hunting. And indeed, they were quite well off for clothing, bedding, dwellings, and vessels for cooking and for other purposes. For the skills that involve moulding and weaving do not require any iron, and God gave both these skills to humanity to provide all ^{679B} these necessities, so that whenever the human race faced a challenge of this sort it would still be able to develop and progress.

Now under such circumstances they were not especially poor, nor did poverty force them into conflict with themselves. Yet they could never become wealthy either, in the absence of gold and silver, which they did not have then. Now the noblest characters of all generally arise in a society in which neither poverty nor riches reside, since violence ^{679C} and injustice, rivalry and jealousy find no place there. Because of all this and because of their so-called simple-mindedness too, they were good people. Indeed such was their simple-mindedness that whenever they heard something described as noble or as base, they took this to be the very truth, and they believed what was said. For unlike people nowadays, none of them knew how to use wisdom in order to suspect falsehood. So they took what is said about the gods and humanity to be true, and they lived in accordance with what is said. Consequently they were, in every respect, the sort of people we have been describing.

Cle: Well I agree with you on this anyway, and so does this man here.

Ath: ^{679D} Shouldn't we say that the many generations who lived in this way were bound to be less skilled, and have less understanding of skills, in general, than people born before the flood, or people nowadays, especially the military skills practised nowadays in land battles, or on the open seas or indeed in the city itself, where they are called law suits and civil factions, which contrive by word and deed ^{679E} to inflict mutual harm and injustice by every possible means? Weren't they simpler, more courageous people, more sound-minded too, and altogether more just? And we have already explained the cause of all this.

Cle: That's right.

Ath: Now whatever we have said, and anything we will say next as a consequence, all has a purpose. We want to appreciate what need the people of that era had for laws,^{680A} and who their lawmaker was.

Cle: Yes, you put that very well.

Ath: Wasn't it the case that they had no need of lawgivers, in that age, nor indeed was anything of this sort likely to arise then? For people born during that part of the cycle did not yet even possess the art of writing, they lived, rather, in accordance with custom and the so-called laws of their forefathers.

Cle: Quite likely.

Ath: And yet, this already constitutes some manner of political system.

Cle: What manner?

Ath: ^{680B} The political system of that era, which is still prevalent nowadays among the Greeks and the barbarians too, is what everyone, I believe, calls a dynasty.⁶ Homer says that this system constituted the domestic arrangement of the Cyclopes, and he says: "These people have no institutions, no meetings for counsels; rather they make their habitations in caverns hollowed among the peaks of the high mountains, and each one is the law for his own wives and children, and cares nothing about the others."⁷

Cle: It seems that this poet of yours was quite charming. In fact we have also studied other verses of his which were most sophisticated, not many though, since we Cretans are not much in the habit of using foreign poetry.

Megillus: As for ourselves in Sparta, we do use Homer, and he seems superior to other poets of this sort, even though the way of life he generally describes is more ^{680D} Ionian⁸ than Spartan. But just now he seems to support your argument, when his story attributes the ancient system of these fellows to their wildness.

Ath: Yes, he does provide support, and we may use him as evidence indicating that political systems of this sort do arise, on occasion.

Cle: Good.

Ath: Don't these originate from the people who were dispersed into single family units or clans due to the difficulty during the destructions? ^{680E} Under such systems, doesn't the eldest person exercise authority because authority originates from the father and mother, whom they follow like birds? Don't they form a single flock, living under paternal law, and a kingship that is the most just kingship of all?

Cle: Very much so.

⁶ Dynasty (*dunasteia*) here means power, lordship, sovereignty.

⁷ Odyssey IX, 112 ff, Lattimore translation. Homer is describing the political system of the Cyclopes who were giants with a single eye in their foreheads.

⁸ Ionia (adjective: Ionian), where Homer is thought to have come from, refers to the west coast and islands of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) colonized by refugees from the Greek mainland. The Spartans lived on mainland Greece in the Peloponnese and were of Dorian stock.

Ath: After all this, they come together in larger numbers, thus forming cities. They take to farming, at first in the foothills, ^{681A} building enclosures surrounded by dry stone walls to provide a defence against wild animals, and they construct a single large common dwelling place.

Cle: Yes, that's likely to be how all this happens.

Ath: There is something else that is likely too.

Cle: What?

Ath: These dwelling places grew in size out of the lesser units that were there initially. Each of the small units arrived, clan by clan, with its own ruling elder, and its own particular customs, ^{681B} because of the fact that they had dwelled apart from one another. Since those who begot and reared them were different in each case, the customs they adopted concerning the gods and themselves were different too. They were more orderly when they had more orderly ancestors, and more courageous when they had more courageous ones. So, as we were saying, each group arrived into the larger unit having its own particular laws, and accordingly each imposed its own preferences upon their children and their children's children.

Cle: Yes, it's inevitable.

Ath: ^{681C} And it is also inevitable, I presume, that each group would favour its own laws over the laws of others.

Cle: Quite so.

Ath: It seems then, that we have somehow, unwittingly, made a foray into the origins of legislation.

Cle: It does indeed.

Ath: In any case, what's needed next is for these groups that have come together, to choose some representative from among their number who will review all of the regulations. Whatever regulations they most favour for common use, they will present openly, and put them forward for adoption by the various leaders and chiefs of the people, who are, in a sense, their kings. ^{681D} The representatives themselves will be called lawgivers, and once they have put rulers in place, and thus formed an aristocracy,⁹ or indeed a kingship, instead of the dynasties, they will, themselves, live under this transformed political system.

Cle: Yes, that's what would happen next, albeit gradually.

Ath: Well let's go on to speak of a third sort of political system that arises. In this system, all forms of political systems and of cities too, converge together, and all sorts of things happen to them.

Cle: What sort is this?

⁹ *Aristokratia*, the rule of the *aristos*, the best, the most excellent.

Ath: ^{681E} The one that Homer too indicated as coming after the second, when he said that the third sort arose as follows: “He founded Dardania”, he says, I believe, “since there was yet no sacred Ilium made a city in the plain to be a centre of peoples, but they lived yet in the foothills of Ida.”¹⁰

^{682A} Yes, these lines that he speaks, and the others about the Cyclopes too, are in accord somehow with God and with nature. For the poetical folk, being inspired when they are singing are also, indeed, divine and in the company of some Graces and Muses¹¹ they often lay hold of a true version of events.

Cle: Yes, very much so.

Ath: Let’s delve further into the story that is engaging us now, since it may, perhaps, indicate something relevant to our overall purpose. Shouldn’t we do so?

Cle: ^{682B} Yes indeed.

Ath: Ilium was founded, we maintain, when they moved down from the high places to a vast and beautiful plain. It was situated on a low ridge that had numerous rivers coming down from Mount Ida.

Cle: Yes, so they say.

Ath: Don’t we think that this happened many years after the deluge?

Cle: Yes, it must have been many years later.

Ath: At any rate, they were, it seems, strangely forgetful of the disaster we are speaking of, ^{682C} since they located their city in this way, below numerous rivers flowing down from the high places, and put their trust in some ridges of no great height.

Cle: It is obvious then, that they were separated from the disaster by an enormous interval of time.

Ath: And many other cities, I imagine, had already been founded by then, as the human race increased in numbers.

Cle: Indeed.

Ath: These presumably waged war against Ilium and they probably did so by sea since, by then, they were all taking to the sea, fearlessly.

Cle: ^{682D} Apparently.

Ath: And after a ten year wait, the Achaeans¹² sacked Troy.

Cle: They certainly did.

¹⁰ Iliad XX, 216 ff. Lattimore translation. “He” refers to Dardanos, an ancestor of the Trojan kings who ruled the entire Troad. His grandson, Tros, gave his name to Troy and the Trojans. Ilium, more commonly known as Troy, is near the southern entrance to the Hellespont. Mount Ida is southeast of Troy.

¹¹ The Graces personify beauty, charm and grace. The Muses, daughter of Zeus and Mnemosyne (Memory), inspire poets and grant them the gift of song.

¹² In Homer’s *Iliad* the Greeks who fought at Troy are referred to as Achaeans, Danaans and Argives.

Ath: Now, during this ten year period when Ilium was under siege,¹³ matters unfolded very badly for the various besiegers in their own countries because of rebellion on the part of the younger generation. And when the combatants got back to their own cities and homes, the young did not receive them in a noble and just manner, and ^{682E} so there was death, slaughter and exile on a huge scale. Those who had been expelled came back again under a changed name, being called Dorians rather than Achaeans, after Dorieus¹⁴ who had gathered the exiles together at the time. And you Spartans tell the story of all the events that happened after this, and you describe them in detail.

Meg: Indeed.

Ath: Well, as if by divine intervention, we have now arrived back again at the very point from which we digressed in the early stages of our discussion about laws,¹⁵ when we came across the subject of music and drunkenness. And our argument is letting us come to grips with it, so to speak, for it has come around to the establishment of Sparta ^{683A} herself, and you maintain that Sparta was established correctly, as was Crete, which has kindred laws.¹⁶ So, we have now gained this much advantage from the wandering course of our argument, as we deal with various political systems and settlements: in the settlements we have seen a first, second and third city,¹⁷ succeeding one another, we believe, over some immense span of time. And now this fourth city, or nation if you prefer, has arrived; it was once in the process of being founded, and has now been founded. ^{683B} Now perhaps we might be able to understand, from all this, what has been properly founded and what has not, what sort of laws save those that are saved, or ruin those that are ruined, and what sort of changes, in what respects, would produce a happy city. If we can do so, dear Megillus and Cleinias, then we should state all this, once more, as if we were starting all over again, unless we find some fault with the earlier arguments.

Meg: Well stranger, if some god were to promise us that, in return for making a second attempt ^{683C} at the enquiry into legislation, we would hear arguments that are no worse and no shorter than what has just been presented, I for one would willingly go far to hear it, and this day would seem short to me, even though it is almost the summer solstice when the god turns summer days towards winter.

Ath: It seems we should conduct an enquiry then.

Meg: Very much so.

Ath: Then let's use our imagination to place ourselves in that age when Sparta, Argos, Messene and their adjacent territories ^{683D} had all, more or less, come under the control of your ancestors.¹⁸

¹³ The legend of the Siege and Fall of Troy is now regarded as based on historical events; the Ilium of the tradition is usually identified with the Troy-VIIa (c. 1250 BC) of modern archaeology.

¹⁴ Dorieus is not heard of elsewhere and the account here is vague. The traditional story is that Dorian invaders, also known as the "Sons of Heracles" subjugated the Peloponnese some time after the fall of Troy. The Dorians are one linguistic and religious subgroup of Greeks, the other being the Ionians, see footnote at 680d.

¹⁵ See *Laws* I. 636Eff.

¹⁶ See *Laws* I. 637A-B. *Eunomia* meaning 'good order' was the name of the Spartan constitution instituted by Lycurgus.

¹⁷ The first city is a dynasty (680B), the second an aristocracy (681D), the third city is in the plains (682B). The fourth, which will be described (683B-D), is a league of cities.

¹⁸ i.e. the Dorians.

They decided, next, so the story goes, to divide the host into three, thus founding three cities, Argos, Messene and Sparta.¹⁹

Meg: Yes indeed.

Ath: And Temenos became king of Argos, Cresphontes king of Messene, and Procles and Eurysthenes kings of Sparta.²⁰

Meg: Of course.

Ath: And everyone, at the time, swore an oath to these kings, to come to their aid should anyone^{683E} ever try to destroy their kingdom.

Meg: Indeed.

Ath: But by Zeus, is a kingdom ever brought down, or indeed, has any government ever been brought down by anything else besides the rulers themselves? Or have we now forgotten that we proposed this a short time ago²¹ in those arguments we came across?

Meg: No, how could we forget?

Ath: In that case we can now make this position more certain, since we have come across historical events that seem to bring us to the same argument.^{684A} Accordingly we shall be investigating it on the basis of something that actually happened, in truth, rather than something abstract. What actually happened was as follows: each of the three kingships, and the cities over which they reigned, swore an oath to one another, in accordance with the common laws which they had instituted about ruling and being ruled. The rulers swore not to make their rule more oppressive as the years and the generations advanced. The subjects swore that as long as the rulers upheld the agreement, they themselves would never subvert their kingship, nor allow others^{684B} to do so. Kings swore to come to the aid of kings, and of the people too, when they were wronged, and the people swore to aid other peoples, and kings too when they were wronged. Isn't this so?

Meg: 'Tis so, indeed.

Ath: Wasn't this the most important factor in the settled order of the political systems in the three cities, as established by law, whether enacted by kings or anyone else?

Meg: What?

Ath: That two cities are always allies set against the other one, if it ever disregards the established laws.

Meg: Of course.

Ath:^{684C} And indeed, most people insist that their legislators pass the sort of laws that the general populace will accept willingly. It's as if a trainer or physician had to look after and cure people's bodies, in a pleasant way.

¹⁹ All three cities and their territories are in the Peloponnese.

²⁰ By casting lots (Apol. II.viii.4).

²¹ England (page 360/1) thinks that this is a reference to a meeting on the previous day since there is no indication at the start of the *Laws* that the three men are meeting for the first time. Other commentators hold various other views.

Meg: Entirely so.

Ath: And yet if one can bring about a sound and healthy condition of the body, without the involvement of an enormous amount of pain, one should often be content with that.

Meg: Indeed.

Ath: ^{684D} And the legislators at the time had a further, not insignificant advantage, in instituting their laws easily.

Meg: What sort of advantage?

Ath: The legislators were not subject to one very serious accusation, as they set about ensuring equality of wealth, an accusation that arises in many other cities when they are passing laws. Whenever someone seeks to make a change in land ownership or to cancel debts, because he sees that without such measures it would not ever be possible for equality to arise, to any significant extent, he meets resistance. Everyone opposes a lawgiver who attempts to change anything of this sort, telling ^{684E} him not to disturb the fixed systems, and they curse him for introducing the redistribution of land and the abolition of debts, with the result that everyone ends up perplexed. But for the Dorians there was also the advantage that all this worked out nicely, and without any evil consequences, because there was no dispute over the distribution of land, and there were no large, long-standing debts. ²²

Meg: True.

Ath: Then why ever, best of men, did their settlement and legislation turn out as badly as it did?

Meg: ^{685A} In what way? What fault do you find with them?

Ath: That although three states were founded, two of the three quickly subverted their own political systems and their laws, and one alone has remained as it was, and that is your city, Megillus.²³

Meg: You are asking a difficult question.

Ath: And yet, this is what we should now consider and investigate, as we play this sober old men's game concerning laws, to relieve the pain of our journey, as we said when we first set out.²⁴

Meg: ^{685B} Indeed. We should do as you say.

Ath: Well when it comes to laws, what better enquiry could we make than an enquiry into the laws by which these states have been regulated? And when it comes to the foundation of cities, could we consider any that are greater and more renowned than these?

Meg: Apart from these, it is not easy to name any others.

Ath: Well this much is fairly obvious, the people of that era intended this arrangement as an adequate ^{685C} protection, not just for the Peloponnese, but for all of Greece, in case any of the

²² This issue arises again in Book V at 736c-d

²³ Sparta

²⁴ See *Laws* 1. 625B.

barbarian races²⁵ should do them wrong. This is just what those who lived around Ilium did at the time: they placed such trust in the might of the Assyrians, as it stood during the reign of Ninus,²⁶ that they arrogantly provoked the war against Troy. For the still surviving grandeur of the Assyrian empire was quite considerable, and the Greeks of the time feared its unified structure, just as we fear the Great King²⁷ nowadays. Indeed the second²⁸ taking of Troy ^{685D} became a great reproach against the Greeks, since it was part of the empire of the Assyrians. To deal with all these issues, there was that single arrangement of military forces, divided then into three cities, under the command of three kings, who were brothers, as they were all sons of Heracles. This, it seems, was an excellent arrangement, superior indeed to the Trojan ^{685E} expedition. For, in the first place, these sons of Heracles were regarded as better commanders than the sons of Pelops,²⁹ and what's more, this military force was thought to be superior in excellence to the Trojan expedition which consisted of Achaeans who, although they had been victorious at Troy, were later defeated by the Dorians.³⁰ Don't we imagine that people organised themselves in this way in those days, and with this intention?

Meg: Entirely so.

Ath: Now weren't they also likely to presume that these arrangements would possess some stability, and would last for a considerable period of time, since they had shared many hardships and dangers together, and had been organised under the command of a single family, their kings being brothers? What's more, they had consulted many oracles among whom was Apollo of Delphi.

Meg: Yes, that is most likely.

Ath: But these high hopes, it seems, took flight and were gone, soon after, except, as we said just now, for a small part ^{686B} of the alliance, the part in your region, and this has engaged in uninterrupted warfare against the other two parts, right down to the present day. But if the original intention had come to fruition, and they had agreed upon a single aim, they would have possessed military power that none could withstand.

Meg: Inevitably.

Ath: So, how was it destroyed and in what way? Isn't it worth investigating what turn of fortune brought down such a great confederacy as this?

Meg: Yes, for anyone who neglects these issues and investigates something else would hardly catch sight of laws and political systems ^{686C} that preserve such great and noble undertakings or indeed, on the contrary, bring them down completely.

²⁵ The Greeks referred to all non-Greek speaking people as "barbarians. The term was not necessarily pejorative.

²⁶ The mythical founder of the Assyrian Empire, an important kingdom in the Upper Tigris region in modern Iraq.

²⁷ The 'Great King' always referred, in common parlance, to the king of Persia.

²⁸ According to the Iliad (V 640-51), Heracles sacked Troy a generation prior to the Trojan War when Laomedon, Priam's father, ruled. To breach the walls of the city, Heracles "sailed for Ilium with eighteen ships of fifty oars each" (Apol.II.vi.4). Both campaigns against Troy were depicted on the east and west pediments of the Temple of Aphaia on Aegina.

²⁹ Menelaus, king of Sparta and Agamemnon, king of Mycenae.

³⁰ In this account the Dorians who defeated the Achaeans after the Trojan war were Heraclids - descendants (sons) of Heracles. See footnote at 683e.

Ath: Well in that case, it seems, we have, fortunately, embarked somehow upon a significant investigation.

Meg: We have indeed.

Ath: So, my good man, are we, now, like most people, unwittingly presuming, every time we see some good object, that it would accomplish something wonderful if only someone knew, ^{686D} somehow or other, how to use this properly. But perhaps we, equally, are not thinking correctly or in accord with nature, about this very issue, and neither is anyone else who thinks in this way about any other matters.

Meg: What do you mean? What exactly is this argument of yours concerned with? What can we say?

Ath: My good man, I was laughing just now, at my own behaviour. For as soon as I beheld this host we are talking about, it seemed glorious to me, and a wonderful acquisition for the Greeks to come by, if only, as I said, someone had used it properly ^{686E} at the time.

Meg: Wasn't it sound and reasonable for you to say all this, and for us to endorse it too?

Ath: Perhaps. At any rate, I am of the view that everyone who sees something of significance, possessing power and a lot of strength, immediately feels that if only its possessor knew how to use this, being the sort of thing it is, being as great as it is, he would produce wonderful results aplenty, and would enjoy happiness.

Meg: ^{687A} That's correct too, isn't it? Or what do you say?

Ath: Well consider this: what should a person look to, to ensure that he says the right thing when bestowing such praise on anything? Firstly, in the case we are now discussing, if those who were organising the military force at the time had known how to arrange it properly, how would they have set about achieving their objective? Wouldn't they have had good grounds for praising the arrangement if they had set it up securely, safe for all time, so that they themselves were free, and had authority over others, as they wished, and that they themselves, and their descendants too, could do as they pleased among their fellow men, Greeks ^{687B} and barbarians alike?

Meg: Entirely so.

Ath: And isn't it also the case, that someone who sees enormous wealth or exceptional family prestige, or anything else of that sort, might say the very same things? He looks at this and assumes that through this someone might obtain everything he desires, or the most significant part of it anyway.

Meg: Quite likely.

Ath: ^{687C} Come on then, is there one object of desire, common to all men, that is now being revealed by the argument, according to the argument itself?

Meg: What sort of desire?

Ath: That whatever happens, would take place according to the command of his own soul, in most cases or, failing that in the case of human affairs at least.

Meg: Indeed.

Ath: Now since all of us, children and old men alike, are wishing for something of this sort, all of the time, wouldn't we also, necessarily, pray for this constantly?

Meg: Inevitably.

Ath: ^{687D} And indeed we would presumably join our loved ones in prayer, for whatever they pray for, for themselves.

Meg: Indeed.

Ath: Now a son, who is a child, is loved by his father who is a man.

Meg: Of course.

Ath: And yet, in many cases, the father might pray to the gods that what the son prays for, for himself, would never come to pass at all.

Meg: You mean when the prayers are uttered while his son is still young and foolish?

Ath: But what if the father, because of his old age, or out of sheer impetuosity, ^{687E} with no recognition of what's good and just, prays with great eagerness, whilst gripped by passions akin to those of Theseus towards his son Hippolytus, who died so tragically?³¹ Do you think that a son who realises this will join in the prayers of his father?

Meg: I understand your meaning. Indeed you seem to me to be saying that a man must not pray and strive that everything conform to his own wishes, but that his wishes conform to his own wisdom. Every city, and each and every one of us, should pray and be eager for this: to possess reason.

Ath: ^{688A} Yes, and a statesman or lawgiver, especially, should always look to this when putting legal arrangements in place. And I am myself reminded, and I am reminding the two of you, that at the beginning of our discussion, if you recall, your principle was that the good lawgiver should institute all regulations for the sake of war.³² But I maintained that this would encourage them to institute the laws, aiming at only one of the four excellences, when they ^{688B} should really look to all four, but most of all and primarily to the chief and leader of all excellence combined: this would be wisdom, reason and opinion, along with the love and desire that follow them.³³

So our argument has arrived back at the same place once more, and I am now saying, once again, what I said then, in jest, if you please, or in all seriousness, that to have recourse to prayer, without possessing reason, is perilous and what unfolds is the opposite of what was wished for. ^{688C} You may take me seriously if you wish to do so, for I really expect that you will discover, if you follow the argument we put forward a while ago, that the cause of the destruction of the kingdoms, and of the entire plan of action, was not cowardice, or ignorance of warfare, on the part of the rulers or

³¹ Hippolytus was accused by Phaedra, his stepmother, of trying to rape her. Her husband, Theseus, believed her accusations and cursed his son, asking the sea god Poseidon to kill him. Poseidon sent a bull from the sea which terrified the horses pulling Hippolytus' chariot. He became entangled in their reins and was dragged to his death. As his son lay dying, Theseus learned of Phaedra's treachery.

³² See *Laws* I. 625C-628E,

³³ See *Laws* I. 630E-631D.

their proper subjects. They were ruined by evil in general, but mostly by ignorance of the most important of human ^{688D} undertakings.

Now since we are friends, I shall try my best to discover, and to show you, if you like, by going systematically through the argument, that this was how matters unfolded at the time, and still unfold today, given similar circumstances, and that hereafter nothing will happen in a different way.

Cle: Well stranger, mere words of praise would be an insult to you, so we shall praise you heartily with our deeds, for we shall follow what you say, eagerly, and that's how a free born man makes his approval or disapproval most evident.

Meg: ^{688E} Excellent, Cleinias, we should do so as you say.

Cle: Let it be so, god willing. Speak on.

Ath: So following the remaining course of the argument, we maintain that what destroyed that power, then, was enormous ignorance, and naturally it still does the same thing today. Accordingly, if this is so, the lawgiver must try to implant as much wisdom as he can in the cities, and do his very best to eradicate ignorance.

Cle: Of course.

Ath: ^{689A} What kind of ignorance may justifiably be called the greatest? Decide whether you both agree with what I say, for I am going to make a suggestion.

Cle: What is it?

Ath: It is the ignorance whereby something seems noble and good to someone, but he does not love this, but hates it, and loves and welcomes what seems degenerate and unjust. This discord between pleasure and pain, on the one hand, and reasoned opinion, on the other, is, I maintain, the utmost and greatest ignorance, because it pervades most of the soul. ^{689B} Indeed the part of the soul that feels pain and pleasure corresponds to the general populace of a city. Now when this part is opposed to knowledge, opinion and reason, the soul's natural ruling elements, this I call folly in a city, when most of the people do not obey the rulers and the laws. And it's the same in a single individual too, when the noble principles present in the soul accomplish nothing but have the very opposite effect. All these, I would suggest, ^{689C} constitute the most discordant forms of ignorance in a city, and indeed, in any one of its citizens,³⁴ but not the ignorance of its workmen, if you understand me, strangers.

Cle: We understand, my friend, and we agree with what you are saying.

Ath: So that's settled then, and let it be resolved, and proclaimed, that no authority should be entrusted to those who are in the grip of such ignorance. They should be censured for their ignorance even if they are highly rational, and well trained in all sorts of cleverness, and in everything that naturally produces a quick ^{689D} witted soul. Those however who are, more or less, the opposite of these fellows should be hailed as wise, and authority should be given to them because they are sensible people, even if, as the saying goes, "they don't know how to read or to swim".

³⁴ See *Laws* I. 644C-645B.

For how, my friends, could there be wisdom, even to the slightest extent, in the absence of concord? There could not. But the greatest and most exalted concord may, quite rightly, be called the greatest wisdom, and whoever lives in accord with reason shares in this. But he who is devoid of this turns out, time and again, ^{689E} to be a subverter of his household and no saviour of his city, but the exact opposite, because of his foolishness in these respects. So, as we just said, let this stand as our declaration.

Cle: Yes, let it stand.

Ath: Now in our cities there must, I presume, be people who rule and people who are ruled.

Cle: Indeed.

Ath: ^{690A} So be it. And how many rights, of what sort, to rule and be ruled, are there, in cities, large or small, and in households too, in like manner? Isn't one of these the right of father and mother? And, in general, wouldn't the right of parents to rule over their offspring be accepted everywhere?

Cle: Very much so.

Ath: Following from this is the right of the well-born to rule over the base-born, and thirdly, as a consequence of these, that the elder should rule, and the younger be ruled.

Cle: Indeed.

Ath: ^{690B} And fourthly, that slaves should be ruled, and their masters should rule them.

Cle: Of course.

Ath: Fifthly, I believe, that the stronger should rule and the weaker should be ruled.

Cle: Yes, that one is quite inevitable.

Ath: Yes, and this one is prevalent among all living creatures, and it accords with nature, as Pindar the Theban³⁵ once said. But the most important right, it seems, would be the sixth, declaring that the wise should lead and rule, ^{690C} and anyone devoid of knowledge should follow. And yet, O wise Pindar, I myself could never maintain that such natural rule of law, over willing subjects, without use of force, is contrary to nature. It accords with nature.

Cle: Absolutely correct.

Ath: We say that the seventh form of rule involves the favour of god, and good fortune. So we introduce people to a lottery system, and the most just outcome, we maintain, is that he to whom the lot falls should rule, while he who fails should depart and be ruled.

Cle: Very true.

Ath: ^{690D} And to someone who sets about instituting laws in a light hearted manner, we might say, playfully; "My dear lawmaker, do you see, then, just how many rights there are, relating to rulership, and that they are naturally in conflict with one another? In fact, we have now discovered

³⁵ Pindar, a late 6th century lyric poet, was commissioned by the wealthy to write victory odes celebrating the athletes in the games throughout the Greek world. He also wrote other types of poetry and was regarded by antiquity as the greatest of the nine poets of the lyric canon.

a well-spring of conflicts, which you need to remedy. But first join us in an inquiry as to how the Kings of Argos and Messene destroyed themselves and, simultaneously, the power of the Greeks, which was so wondrous at the time. ^{690E} What was their transgression of these rights? Wasn't it their ignorance of the excellent maxim of Hesiod³⁶ that the half is often more than the whole? Meaning that when it is ruinous to get the whole, and half is the right measure, he thought that what's measured aright is more, because it is better than what's unmeasured and worse."

Cle: An excellent saying indeed.

Ath: Now do we think that this brings about destruction when it arises among kings, or among the general population?

Cle: ^{691A} Well this is likely, for the most part, to be a disease of kings, because of their opulent and luxurious lifestyle.

Ath: Isn't it clear then, that the kings at the time were the first to catch this disease of greed for more than the established laws allowed? There was no concord among them on the very agreement they had sworn to adhere to, under oath, and this discord which, according to us, is the greatest ignorance even though it seems like wisdom, destroyed everything through a discordant and strident unmusicality.³⁷

Cle: Quite likely.

Ath: ^{691B} So be it. Now what precaution should the lawgiver have taken at the time, to ensure that this affliction did not arise? By the gods, it takes no wisdom to understand this today, and the question is easy to answer, but if it could have been foreseen at the time, whoever had foreseen it would have been wiser than any of us.

Meg: What are you referring to?

Ath: By looking at what happened among your people, Megillus, it is possible, today, to come to an understanding, and then say, quite readily, what should have happened at that time.

Meg: Explain this more clearly.

Ath: The clearest explanation would be along the following lines.

Meg: What?

Ath: ^{691C} If someone gives the greater to the lesser, be it a sail to a ship, food to a body, authority to a soul, without regard for the measure, he turns everything upside down, and in their wantonness some will run to disease, others to injustice, born of arrogance. So what exactly are we saying? Is it something like this? There is no mortal soul whose nature will ever be able to bear supreme authority over human beings, while still being young and irresponsible. ^{691D} Its thinking will be filled with ignorance, that terrible disease, so that the soul comes to hate its nearest and dearest, and when this happens soul itself is quickly destroyed, and all of its power comes to nothing. Now to guard against this by understanding the measure, is the mark of great lawgivers. So, today it is quite reasonable to guess that this actually happened at that time, but it seems there was also ...

³⁶ Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 33ff.

³⁷ See 689A, the greatest ignorance.

Meg: What?

Ath: There was some god caring for you, who foresaw the impending events and expanded your line of kings to two instead of one, ^{691E} thus reducing their power more in the direction of due measure.³⁸ As well as this, someone whose human nature had a mixture of divine power, saw that your government was still at fever pitch. So he blended the sound-minded power of old age, with the self-willed strength of the royal line by making the vote of the twenty eight elders ^{692A} equal to the power of the kings on the most important matters. And your third saviour, observing that your government was still wanton and inflamed, cast a sort of bridle around them, and this was the power of the ephors, which is close enough to the power of the lottery. And according to this account, your kingdom, constituted from the appropriate mixture of elements, and possessed of due measure, having saved itself, went on to become responsible ^{692B} for the salvation of the others.³⁹ Since, if this had been left to Temenos and Cresphontes, and the legislators at the time, whoever those legislators may have been, they were not sufficiently experienced in the business of legislation, so even the portion belonging to Aristodemus would not have survived⁴⁰. Otherwise they would hardly have presumed, with a few oaths, to bring measure to a young soul that had just acquired a position of authority that could develop into a tyranny. But now, the god has shown what rulership should have been like then, and should indeed be like now, if it is to endure.

^{692C} For us to recognise all this, now that it has already happened, is, as I said earlier,⁴¹ no mark of wisdom, since it is not difficult to see something from an historical example. But if someone had foreseen all this at the time, and had been able to moderate the rulers, and unify the three of them, all the noble aspirations of that era would have been preserved, and no Persian horde,⁴² or any other, would ever have attacked Greece, despising us as people of no account.

Cle: True.

Ath: ^{692D} At any rate, they repulsed them, Cleinias, in a disgraceful manner. And by disgraceful, I don't mean that the men of that age were not victorious, and I am not denying that they won notable battles, by land and by sea. No, I maintain that what was disgraceful at the time was, firstly, that of these three cities only one came to the defence of Greece. The other two were so badly corrupted that one of them even impeded Sparta in her defence of Greece by fighting against her, with all their might, while the other, Argos, in spite of its primacy at the time of the original division, ^{692E} when called upon to defend Greece against the barbarians, paid no heed and did not defend her. And a lot more could be said about what went on during that war which would not reflect at all well on Greece. In fact, it wouldn't even be right to say that Greece defended itself, because if the joint enterprise of the Athenians and the Spartans had not repulsed ^{693A} that impending

³⁸ The first kings of Sparta (683D) were Procles and Eyrsthenes, twin sons of Aristodemus. See 683 D.

³⁹ Sparta had two royal families, both claiming descent from Heracles, the cultural hero and ancestor of the Dorians. The kingship was hereditary; the two kings were political, military and religious figures. The 28 elders, *Gerousia* (Senators), over the age of sixty, were elected by the Assembly, decided on matters to be discussed and had the power of veto. The 5 *Ephors* (Overseer) who were elected annually by the Assembly—all Spartan citizens were eligible—had judicial, financial and administrative powers over the kings and the senators. The *Ekklesia* (Assembly) consisted of male citizens over 18 who could vote 'Yes' or 'No' and were subject to veto; they only met when summoned and only discussed what was submitted to them.

⁴¹ See 691B.

⁴² Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, vii, 148ff. The reference here and in 692D-693A is to the Persian invasion of Greece 480 and 490.

enslavement, almost all the Greek nations would have been intermixed with one another by now, barbarians with Greeks, and Greeks with barbarians. This is exactly the situation of those who are under the tyranny of Persia, nowadays, having been dispersed, and then jumbled together they live out their lives, wretchedly, in scattered communities.

These, Megillus and Cleinias, are the criticisms we must direct at the so called statesmen, and the lawmakers of past ages and of today so that, by investigating the causes of these failings, we may discover ^{693B} what other courses of action, besides these, they should have adopted. For instance, in the present case, we said that we should not pass laws creating positions of authority that are too powerful, or indeed too pure. We should, rather, keep in mind that the city should be free, wise, and a friend to itself, and the lawgiver should pass laws with his eye fixed upon this aim. Now we have already proposed certain aims, many times, that the lawgiver should look to when passing laws, but we should not be surprised if the proposals ^{693C} seem different to us on each occasion. We need to reckon, for ourselves, that when we maintain that he should look to sound-mindedness, or to wisdom or friendship, these aims are not different but the same, and we should not be troubled if various other expressions of this sort occur.

Cle: We shall try to do as you suggest as we go back over the arguments. But now, tell us, in the case of friendship, wisdom, and freedom, what were you intending to say the lawgiver ^{693D} should aim at?

Ath: Listen then. It would be right to say that there are, as it were, two mother forms of political systems, from which all others arise; one is called monarchy, the other democracy. The extreme of the former is the Persian system, while that of the latter is ours. The others are practically all, as I said, variations of these two. Now a city must, necessarily, have a share in both of these if it is to have freedom and friendship ^{693E} accompanied by wisdom. This then is what our argument wishes to prescribe by saying that a city could never be properly governed in the absence of these two.

Cle: Indeed, how could it be?

Ath: Well the Persian regime has embraced the monarchic, while the other, ours, has favoured freedom, exclusively, to a greater extent than they should in each case. Neither regime has got both of these in the right measure, but your regimes, in Sparta and Crete, do have it more. So did the Athenians and Persians in ancient times, ^{694A} but this is less so nowadays: should we give the reasons why? What do you think?

Cle: Of course, if we are serious about pursuing our objective.

Ath: Listen then: the Persians, during the reign of Cyrus,⁴³ observing the proper measure of subservience and freedom, first attained freedom themselves, and then attained supremacy over many others. For as rulers, they granted freedom to their subjects and maintained equality, so the soldiers were well disposed towards the generals ^{694B} and didn't hold back in the face of danger. And what's more, if anyone among them was wise and capable of offering advice, the king did not begrudge him that opportunity; he allowed free speech and respected those who could assist him in his deliberations, and so the benefit of a man's wisdom was made available to the community,

⁴³ Cyrus the Great 600-530, having become the king of a small kingdom in Persia, by conquest he extended the territory, thereby founding the Persian Empire.

at its very heart. In fact, everything prospered for them in those days because of this freedom, friendship and communal spirit.

Cle: Well that's likely to be how things happened, anyway.

Ath: ^{694C} How was it ever destroyed under Cambyses,⁴⁴ and more or less restored again under Darius⁴⁵? Would you like us to use some sort of prophetic sense to come up with an answer?

Cle: That might help with the enquiry we have embarked upon.

Ath: The sense I now have of Cyrus is that, although he was a good general who loved his city, he had no contact at all with the right sort of education, and had never applied his mind to economics.

Cle: Why would we say this?

Ath: ^{694D} He spent his life, it seems, from his earliest years, on military campaigns and entrusted the upbringing of his children to women, who reared them from their very childhood as though they were already favoured with the blessings of heaven, with no deficiencies. The women would allow no one to oppose the children in anything, because they were so blessed, and they made everyone else praise whatever the children said or did. So they brought them up to be people of a particular sort.

Cle: A noble upbringing, it seems.

Ath: ^{694E} A feminine one, as you would expect from women of the royal household who had recently become rich, who were rearing children in the absence of any men, because they were all caught up in warfare, with all its perils.

Cle: That makes sense.

Ath: But their father acquired flocks for them, sheep too, and herds of humans, and various collections of all sorts of things but he did not realise that he was about to give all this to boys ^{695A} who had not been educated in their fathers' own skill, the skill of a Persian. The Persians were shepherds, sprung from a harsh land, and their skill was a tough one, just what was needed to produce very strong shepherds, well able to live in the open air, go without sleep, and serve in the army if necessary. He simply did not notice that his sons, having been educated ^{695B} by women and eunuchs, had received a corrupted Median education,⁴⁶ because of their so-called blessedness. So, having been brought up without hearing a word of reproach, they turned out to be the sort of people you would expect from such an upbringing. Now when Cyrus died, and the children inherited the kingdom, they were infected with luxury and licentiousness. First, one killed the other because he was angry over their equal status, but after that, he himself, maddened by drink and ill-

⁴⁴ Cambyses, Cyrus' son, was king of Persia from 529-521. He was succeeded by his son Darius who ruled from 521-496.

⁴⁵ Darius the Great 550-486, organizer of the Persian Empire. The suppression of the Ionian Revolt (499-493) resulted in the First Persian War, decided by the Athenian victory at the Battle of Marathon in 490.

⁴⁶ That is, an education in extreme luxury.

education, lost his kingdom to the Medes and the so called eunuch,⁴⁷ who had such utter contempt for the foolishness of Cambyses.

Cle: ^{695C} That's what's said anyway, and it's quite likely that that is more or less what happened.

Ath: And indeed, it is also said, I believe, that authority reverted to the Persians through Darius and the "Seven".⁴⁸

Cle: Indeed.

Ath: Let's look at this then, by following the account. For, Darius was no king's son, and he was not reared and educated in sumptuous luxury. When he came to power, having taken control as one of a group of seven, he divided the kingdom into seven parts, small traces of which remain to this day. He thought it best to administer the kingdom by passing laws introducing some social ^{695D} equality, and he fixed, by law, the tribute money that Cyrus had promised to the Persians, thus ensuring friendship and fellow feeling among all the Persians, by winning the Persian people over with generous gifts.⁴⁹ Consequently his armies were so full of goodwill, that they won as much territory for him as Cyrus had originally left to him.

After Darius, came Xerxes who had, once again, received a pampered, royal education. We could, quite justifiably, say to Darius; "O Darius, because you did not learn ^{695E} from Cyrus' mistake, you trained Xerxes⁵⁰ in the very same habits that Cyrus taught to Cambyses". Anyway, since he was a product of the very same education Xerxes ended up suffering more or less the same fate as Cambyses. And since then, there has hardly been a single king among the Persians who has been truly great,⁵¹ in anything more than name. And what is responsible for this, according to my argument, is not ill fortune, but the bad life that is, for the most part, lived by the children of exceptionally ^{696A} wealthy folk, and tyrants. In fact, no child or man, old or young could ever attain an exceptional level of excellence from such an upbringing as this. These, then, are issues which, we maintain, the lawgiver should take into consideration, and we should do the same right now.

Well it is only right, my Spartan friends, to grant your city this much at least: you do not assign any special honour or education to rich or poor, king or commoner, beyond the prophetic directions you ^{696B} were given at first by some god.⁵² In fact preeminent civic honours should not be conferred just because someone is especially wealthy, no more than we should do so just because the person is swift, or pretty, or strong, unless he has some excellence, and even the excellence should include sound-mindedness.

Meg: What do you mean by this, stranger?

Ath: Courage is, presumably, one part of excellence?

⁴⁷ Gomates, the Eunuch, seized Cambyses kingdom for a short time by impersonating Cambyses' dead brother while Cambyses was away in Egypt.

⁴⁸ After seven months Gomates was slain by seven Persian nobles, one of whom was Darius.

⁴⁹ It seems that Darius distributed among his Persian subjects the tribute money paid by the subjugated peoples rather than keeping it himself or distributing it as he saw fit. See England page 396.

⁵⁰ Xerxes, 486-465, led the second invasion of Greece in 480. He was defeated at the Battle of Salamis and finally at the Battle of Plataea in 479.

⁵¹ The king of Persia was always referred to by the Greeks as "The Great King" but, according to the Athenian Stranger, after Darius they were they great in name only.

⁵² See *Laws* I 624A-625B, 630D and *Laws* III 691ff.

Meg: Of course.

Ath: Well then, listen to the argument and decide this for yourself: would you choose someone who was extremely courageous, but devoid of sound-mindedness and restraint, as your housemate or neighbour?

Meg: ^{696C} What a suggestion!

Ath: What about someone who has a skill, and is wise in that sense, but unjust?

Meg: Not at all.

Ath: And yet, justice does not flourish without sound-mindedness.

Cle: No, how could it?

Ath: Nor indeed does the wisdom we described a while ago,⁵³ of the person whose pleasures and pains are in accord with, and adhere to, correct reasoning.

Meg: Indeed it does not.

Ath: There is a further point we should consider, on the issue of civic honours, ^{696D} and what sort are correctly or incorrectly conferred, on any occasion.

Meg: What point?

Ath: Would sound-mindedness, present in a soul, on its own, without any other excellence, be honourable or dishonourable, rightly speaking?

Meg: I don't know how to answer you?

Ath: And yet, you have responded quite reasonably. In fact, had you chosen either of the two alternatives, you would, in my opinion anyway, have gone awry.

Meg: So my answer has turned out quite well.

Ath: Indeed. It is not worth saying ^{696E} anything about this additional element in the honourable and dishonourable; mute silence is a better option.

Meg: I presume you mean that sound-mindedness is the additional element.

Ath: Yes. And whatever benefits us most, when combined with this additional element, would, rightly, be honoured most. The second most beneficial would be honoured second. And if each successive benefit was given its place in the sequence of honours, in this way, that would be the right way to arrange them.

Meg: ^{697A} Quite so.

Ath: Well then, shouldn't we also say that it is, once again,⁵⁴ the role of the legislator to assign these?

Meg: Very much so.

⁵³ See 689D.

⁵⁴ See *Laws* I 631B-632C,

Ath: Would you like, then, to leave it to him to deal with them all, each individual task and all the details, while we, aspiring to be men of the law, make a threefold division, in an effort to distinguish, separately, between those that are most significant, and those that are in second or third place?

Meg: Yes, certainly.

Ath: So we are saying, it seems, that a city that is to save itself and ^{697B} be as happy as humanly possible, must, of necessity, assign honours and their opposites in the correct manner. It is only right that the goods of the soul occupy the first and most honoured position, provided the soul is possessed of sound-mindedness. In second place are the goods and beauties of the body, and third are the so-called goods associated with property and wealth. Any lawgiver or city that goes outside of those rankings, by elevating wealth to a position of honour, or promoting ^{697C} any of the lesser benefits to a higher status in terms of honour, is performing an unholy and un-statesmanlike act. May we say this or what should we say?

Meg: We may say this, plainly.

Ath: Although our investigation of the political system of the Persians made us say all this, at such length, we still find that they ended up in an even worse predicament. The reason for this, according to us, was that they restricted the freedom of the populace excessively, introduced more subservience than appropriate, and thus they undid the friendship and communal spirit of ^{697D} their city. And once this is gone, the policy of the rulers is no longer framed in the interests of their subjects and the populace, but in the interests of their own authority. If they ever think it will be to their own advantage, even slightly, they devastate whole cities and friendly peoples too, by destroying them with fire, and so they are hated, relentlessly and mercilessly, and they return that hatred. And when they need the populace to fight for them, they find there is no communal spirit among them, no willingness to do battle ^{697E} eagerly in the face of danger. So although, in theory, they have a vast population at their disposal, they are all useless in a war, so they hire people in, as though they were in short supply, believing that their safety lies in foreign mercenaries. As well as this, ^{698A} they inevitably show their ignorance by proclaiming, through their own actions, that everything the city calls honourable and good is a mere trifle in comparison with gold and silver.

Meg: Entirely so.

Ath: Well let that be the end of our discussion of the Persians and how badly their affairs are managed nowadays because of their extreme subservience and authoritarianism.

Meg: Certainly.

Ath: Next we should describe the Attic⁵⁵ political system in the same way, showing that total freedom, without ^{698B} any rulers, is far worse than the regulated authority of others. Indeed, at the time of the Persian advance upon the Greeks, or, perhaps, upon more or less all the inhabitants of Europe, we had a political system of ancient date, with positions of authority based upon four valuations. Reverence was present among us, as a queen, and because of her we were willing to live in subservience to the laws of the time. What's more, the sheer magnitude of the horde that came by land and by sea struck us with fear and perplexity, and increased our subservience to our

⁵⁵ Attica is the name of the city-state which includes Athens and the surrounding territories. Attic and Athenian as adjectives are interchangeable, e.g. Attic Red-Figure pottery, Athenian Red-Figure pottery.

rulers and our laws to an even greater ^{698C} extent. As a result of all this, a strong bond of affection developed among ourselves.

Indeed some ten years before the battle of Salamis, Datis⁵⁶ arrived, leading a Persian horde. He had been sent by Darius with explicit orders, directed against the Athenians and Eretrians: he was to enslave them and deport them, and his own death was the penalty for failure. Datis did not take long ^{698D} to completely overpower the Eretrians with his vast army, and he sent a frightening message to our city, Athens, that not a single Eretrian had escaped him; in fact Datis' soldiers, with joined hands, had swept through the whole territory of Eretria⁵⁷ like a drag net. This story, whatever its source, whether true or false, terrified the other Greeks and especially the Athenians, and no one except the Spartans was willing to help them when they sent embassies everywhere. ^{698E} But because their war against Messene was ongoing at the time, and perhaps, because they were delayed by something else we don't know about, the Spartans arrived one day late for the battle of Marathon.⁵⁸

After this⁵⁹, reports of large-scale preparations, and endless threats kept reaching us from the King. Eventually we were told that Darius had died, and his son,⁶⁰ who had inherited the throne, was young and energetic and had no intentions of giving up on ^{699A} the invasion plan. The Athenians presumed that all these preparations were directed against themselves because of what happened at Marathon, and when they heard that a canal had been dug at Athos,⁶¹ that the Hellespont had been bridged,⁶² and of the huge number of ships in the Persian fleet, they decided that they would be safe, neither by land nor by sea. They realised that no one would help them, for they remembered that when the Persians invaded previously and were successful in Eretria, no one came to their aid, nor did anyone run the risk of fighting alongside them. So they were expecting ^{699B} the same thing to happen again this time, by land, anyway, and they lost all hope of safety by sea, when they saw a thousand Persian ships, or even more, bearing down upon them.

It occurred to them that there was only one safe course, slender and perilous, but the only one: they looked back at what happened previously and how, from the bleak situation that they also faced then, military victory appeared to emerge. Uplifted by this hope, they discovered that their own refuge lay in themselves alone, ^{699C} and in the gods. A number of factors combined to engender a feeling of friendship among them. One was a fear born of their perilous circumstances at the time, while another originated in the ancient laws, a fear they had acquired through their subservience to those laws of old. We have often referred to this fear, in our earlier discussions,⁶³ as “*reverence*”, and we said that anyone who is to be a good person should be subject to this. But the coward is

⁵⁶ Datis was the commander of the Persian expedition in 490. He was sent to punish the island of Eretria, north of Athens for taking part, along with Athens, in the Ionian Revolt against Persian domination in Ionia.

⁵⁷ Located in Euboea, to the south of Chalcis, Eretria was totally destroyed in the First Persian War.

⁵⁸ The Battle of Marathon was fought in 490 on Athenian territory. The Athenians defeated the Persians. The Persians failed to mount an intended attack on Athens itself, fled to their ships and returned to Persia.

⁵⁹ The narrative now moves on to events after the victory over the Persians at Marathon.

⁶⁰ Xerxes

⁶¹ To avoid sailing around the easternmost promontory of the Chalcidice where the Persian fleet had been destroyed in 492, a canal was dug and the ships sailed through safely and then sailed southwards towards Athens. It has recently been archaeologically proven that “the Canal of Xerxes” did in fact exist, although it was probably not used much, after it served its purpose.

⁶² The Hellespont is the strait dividing Europe from Asia at the western end of the Sea of Marmara. The vast Persian army took seven days and nights to cross on specially constructed pontoon bridges

⁶³ See *Laws* I 646E-647C, *Laws* II 671D.

free of reverence, and does not experience it, and unless such people had been seized by terror at the time, they would never have joined the defensive effort to protect their temples, tombs and fatherland, their family and friends, by helping, as they did ^{699D} on that occasion. We would, rather, have been routed then, and all of us scattered this way and that.

Meg: Very much so, my friend, what you have said is correct, and a great credit to yourself and your fatherland.

Ath: Quite so, Megillus, and it is only right to recount the events of that age to you, since you have inherited the character of your forefathers. Now yourself and Cleinias should consider whether we are saying anything that is relevant to law-making. For I am not telling these stories for their own sake ^{699E} but for the sake of the topic I am discussing. Yes, look: the same thing, somehow, happened to ourselves as happened to the Persians, except that they totally subjugated the populace while we, in contrast, urged the masses in the direction of total freedom. So what should we say next, and how should we express it, since our previous arguments have, in a way, been quite well stated.

Meg: ^{700A} Good point, but please try to explain what you are saying to us, a bit more clearly.

Ath: I will. Under our ancient laws, my friends, the populace was not the master. The populace was rather, in a sense, willingly subject to the laws.

Meg: To what sort of laws?

Ath: Firstly to the laws concerning the music of that era. Let's look there so that we may describe, from the beginning, the development of this excessively free lifestyle. At the time, our music was, in fact, divided into various ^{700B} forms and structures. One was a form of song consisting of prayers to the gods, which were called *hymns*. Another form of song, almost the opposite of this, consisted of what are best called *dirges*, and there was another consisting of *paeans*,⁶⁴ and one more, which is called a *dithyramb*,⁶⁵ which is about the birth of Dionysos, I think. *Nomes* were given this particular name,⁶⁶ as being a different kind of song, which they said was for the cithara. Once these and some others had been duly set in order, it was not permitted to apply one form of melody to ^{700C} another form. The ultimate authority to understand these principles, and indeed pass judgement and impose penalties upon those who transgressed them, did not lie, as it does nowadays, with the trumpeting, and uncouth clamouring of the multitude, nor their approving applause. The educated folk themselves agreed to listen, in silence, to the very end, while for children, their attendants and the common crowd, the rod of chastisement kept them in order. So in these matters, the ^{700D} majority of the citizens accepted such regulation and authority and did not dare to pass judgement by clamouring.

After this, with the passage of time, poets arose who were responsible for an unmusical lawlessness, and although they were poetical by nature, they did not understand what was right and lawful in the realm of the Muses. Frenzied, and much in the grip of pleasure, they mixed dirges with hymns, paeans with dithyrambs and even imitated the sound of flutes on the cithara. By combining ^{700E} everything with everything, they, in their ignorance, unintentionally perpetuated

⁶⁴ Paeans are hymns in honour of Apollo and the dithyramb is a choral ode to Dionysos.

⁶⁵ Nomos (also meaning law, custom, tradition) means a style of song with a prescribed *harmonia* (tuning) and a definite rhythm. There were seven canonical types of nomes used either with the lyre (*cithara*) or pipes.

⁶⁶ See *Laws* II 657ff, 669ff.

the false notion that there is no such thing as correctness in music, and that it is quite alright to pass judgement based upon the pleasure it affords to whoever enjoys it, regardless of whether that person is good or bad. By composing works of this sort and adding words of a similar sort, they instilled musical lawlessness into most of the people, and the audacity to believe that they were themselves, competent judges. And so, the spectators ^{701A} became noisy folk rather than a quiet people, as though they themselves understood what was good and bad in the realm of music, and so, instead of the rule by the best, a degenerate rule by the spectators arose. Now, if a democracy of free men had arisen, in music alone, that would not have been a particularly serious development. But our current notion that everyone is wise about everything began with music, as did lawlessness, and following close behind them came liberty, for believing that they knew so much, they had no fear, and their lack of fear begat an absence of shame, for it is surely shamelessness of the lowest order not to fear the opinion ^{701B} of the best, because of an impudence born of excessive liberty.

Meg: Very true.

Ath: Next after this freedom comes another, which is an unwillingness to be subservient to rulers, and after this comes a flight from any subservience to, or correction by father, mother or elders. As the end approaches, they have an urge to pay no heed to any laws, and finally, towards ^{701C} the very end of the process, they disregard oaths, entreaties, and anything to do with the gods, as they display and imitate the fabled ancient nature of Titans,⁶⁷ and reverting once more to the same conditions as those fellows, they usher in a harsh age of unrelenting evils. Well what, again, is the point of saying all this? Apparently I should restrain the argument from time to time, and not allow myself to be borne along ^{701D} by the force of the argument, like a horse with no bridle in its mouth, and, as the saying goes, “fall off my donkey”. So I repeat the question once more: what is the point of saying all this?

Meg: Good question.

Ath: The point relates to what was said previously.

Meg: Which was?

Ath: We said⁶⁸ that the lawgiver should frame laws with three aims in view: that the city, under his laws, will be free, friendly towards itself, and possessed of reason. These were the aims, were they not?

Meg: Certainly.

Ath: ^{701E} With these aims in view we picked the most authoritarian system of government and the one that allowed most freedom, and we are now considering which of these two is governed in the correct manner. Taking a moderate example of each of these, of authoritarianism on the one hand, and of freedom on the other, we saw that everything went exceptionally well for them in each case. But when they went on to the extreme either of subservience in one case, or its opposite in the other, there was no benefit to either of them.

⁶⁷ The 12 Titans, the older generation of gods, are the first-born children of Ouranos and Gaia. The Titans are overthrown by their children, the Olympian gods. The constant battle between the Titans and the Olympians ends when Zeus (an Olympian) imprisons them in the depths of Tartarus.

⁶⁸ See 693B-C

Meg: ^{702A} Very true.

Ath: And indeed, for the same reasons, we looked at the settlement of the Dorian horde, the settlement of Dardanos⁶⁹ in the foothills, the maritime settlement too and indeed the first people who survived the deluge, in addition to our previous discussions about music and drinking, and the topics prior to these.⁷⁰ All this was said for the same reason: in order to see clearly how exactly a city may best be governed and, in the case of an individual, how ^{702B} he may best live his own life. But have we achieved anything worthwhile? What test for ourselves, may we suggest, Megillus and Cleinias?

Cle: I think I have one, stranger. It seems that a certain providence has governed these arguments we have just gone through. For, I was at a stage where I was in need of these, and your arrival, along with Megillus ^{702C} here, was most opportune. I shan't conceal my present predicament from you two, in fact I regard your presence as an omen. For, most of Crete is engaged in forming a colony, and the people of Knossos⁷¹ have been put in charge of the process and their city has assigned the task to myself and nine others. At the same time, they directed us to frame laws, based upon any local laws that we approved of, and any laws from elsewhere, that in our view, were best, regardless of the fact that they were foreign. So let's do this favour to myself and to yourselves: ^{702D} let's construct a city, in words, as though we were founding it from the very beginning, by drawing upon what we have said so far. At the same time this will also constitute our inquiry into the topic we are investigating, and, what's more, I may find this process useful for my future city.

Ath: Well Cleinias, that's not a declaration of war, so if Megillus has no objection, you may presume that as far as I am concerned, you can count on my fullest possible cooperation.

Cle: Well said.

Meg: And the same goes for me.

Cle: ^{702E} Thank you both. So, let's first try to found our city, in words.

End Book 3

⁶⁹ The settlement of Dardanos was called Dardania. See footnote at 681e.

⁷⁰ These themes were spoken about in the reverse order,

⁷¹ One of the principal cities on Crete.