

# Plato's Laws

## Book 5

Translated by David Horan

**Persons in the dialogue:** Athenian Stranger, Cleinias, Megillus

<sup>726A</sup> **Athenian Stranger:** Give ear, then, all you<sup>1</sup> who have heard, just now, about gods and beloved ancestors.

The most divine thing that anyone possesses, after gods, is soul, his closest kindred. All things that ever belong to anyone are of two kinds: the superior and better, acting as masters, and the inferior and worse, acting as servants, and those that act as master should always be held in higher esteem than those that serve. Accordingly, I say that a person's own soul should be accorded a place of honour second only to the gods <sup>727A</sup> and those who follow in their train, and I am right to encourage this. Yet none of us really bestows honour in the correct way, although we think we do. For honour is presumably a divine good, and nothing bad is worthy of honour, and anyone who believes he is exalting his soul with some words or gifts or indulgences, while making it no better than it was before, thinks he is bestowing honour, when he is doing no such thing.

Every child, for instance, no sooner comes to manhood than he believes he is capable of understanding everything; so he imagines he is honouring his own soul once he is praising it, and he eagerly grants it licence to do as it pleases. But we are now saying that by acting in this way he is harming his soul rather than honouring it, when, according to us, soul should be second in honour only to the gods. Again whenever a person presumes that other people, and not himself, are consistently responsible for his own transgressions, and his many significant vices, while he always holds himself blameless, thinking he is honouring his own soul, he is really <sup>727C</sup> doing no such thing, he is in fact harming his soul. Similarly when he indulges in pleasures, contrary to the direction and encouragement of the lawgiver, he is not honouring his soul at all but dishonouring it by filling it with woes and regret. And again, in the opposite case, when someone won't make an effort to endure the approved hardships and fears, travails and sufferings, but gives in; his capitulation does not honour his soul, indeed all behaviour of this sort brings dishonour.

Nor indeed does he honour his soul when he imagines <sup>727D</sup> that being alive is good under any circumstances, rather, he dishonours it, for his soul then forms the view that everything that happens in the other world is evil, and he goes along with this notion instead of resisting it, by instruction and refutation, because the soul doesn't really know if, on the contrary, the greatest goods of all, for us, are to be found in the realm of the gods of that place. And indeed, whenever someone honours some earthly beauty, above excellence, this is the same as dishonouring the soul, completely and utterly, as it is tantamount to declaring, falsely, <sup>727E</sup> that the body is more honourable than the soul. Indeed, nothing earth born is more honourable than the heavenly, and whoever forms any other opinion about the soul has no idea how wondrous a possession he is despising.

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<sup>1</sup> All of Book V, apart from the very end, consists of the Athenian Stranger's address, apparently to the new colonists as at 716 and 717.

Again when someone loves acquiring wealth by base means,<sup>728A</sup> or has no qualms about doing so, he is not honouring his soul with such gifts, far from it; he sells his soul's treasure and nobility for a little bit of gold. But all the gold on earth, or beneath the earth, is not as valuable as excellence. So, to sum it all up, once the lawgiver has set out, in detail, what's disgraceful and evil on the one hand, and what's good and noble on the other, whoever is not prepared to refrain from the one by every means at his disposal, and practice the other to the utmost of his ability, does not realise that, in doing all this,<sup>728B</sup> he is heaping vile dishonour and deformity on his most divine possession, his soul.

For no one really takes account of the greatest judgement, so called, passed upon evil-doing: to become like unto men who are already evil, and having become like this, to flee from and avoid good men and good words, and pursue the other sort of people, cleave to them and keep their company. But in consorting with such people, he inevitably does what they naturally do, and experiences<sup>728C</sup> what such people naturally experience and say among themselves. Now this state of affairs does not constitute justice, since justice and what's just are noble. It is, rather, a punishment, a consequence of wrong-doing, and the person who meets with it, and the person who does not, are both wretched, in one case because he is not cured, in the other because he is undone so that many others may be saved. But for us, honour consists, generally speaking, in following the better and doing our utmost to improve the worse, when it can be improved.

Now when it comes to fleeing<sup>728D</sup> from evil and following the trail of the utmost excellence, choosing that, and then living the rest of one's life in communion with that, a human being has no possession more naturally suited to the purpose, than soul. That's why we assigned it second place in terms of honour<sup>2</sup>, while third place, as anyone would recognise, goes to the honour that naturally belongs to the body. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider the various honours, which of them are true and which are spurious: this is the role of the lawgiver.

Now, as I see it, he will declare these honours to be as follows and of the following kinds: the body that is worthy of honour is not the one that is beautiful, or strong, or the one possessed of speed or stature, or indeed, the one that is healthy,<sup>728E</sup> even though this is what most people think. Nor are bodies of the opposite sort to be honoured either, but those that occupy a middle position are the most sound-minded and safest, by far, while the other two make people's souls conceited and arrogant in one case, and submissive and slavish in the other. The same holds for the acquisition of wealth and possessions, and the same ranking, in terms of honour, applies too. For excess of each of these<sup>729A</sup> brings about enmity and faction, in public and in private, while their deficiency, for the most part, leads to slavery. Let no one, then, covet wealth for his children's sake so that he may leave them as wealthy as he possibly can, as this is good neither for them, nor for the city. Indeed, unflattering wealth that still provides for our needs is what's best of all, and most musical, for the young. For it is harmonious and it suits us and ensures a life<sup>729B</sup> that is free from pain in every respect.

We should bequeath to our children a great sense of reverence, rather than gold. We imagine that we shall bequeath this legacy to the young if we chastise them when they are disrespectful; but the exhortation used nowadays, which declares that the young must be respectful to everyone, won't bring this about. The thoughtful lawgiver would, rather, exhort the older generation to show respect for the young, and to be careful, above all else lest any of the young folk ever see an elder, or even hear tell of him, doing or saying<sup>729C</sup> anything shameful, because where the old have no shame, the young, in that place, are also, inevitably, devoid of reverence.

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<sup>2</sup> See *Laws V*. 726A.

Indeed the best education of the young, and of ourselves, consists not in admonishment, but in being seen to exemplify, in practice, throughout one's life, the very directions we use when admonishing others.

Someone who honours and respects all his kindred who share the family gods, and naturally have the same blood, would, within reason, retain the favour of the birth gods, in the procreation of his own children. And indeed we would secure the goodwill of friends and companions, <sup>729D</sup> in daily affairs, by regarding their services to us as more significant and important than they themselves regard them, and conversely, by reckoning our own kindnesses to friends as less significant than our friends and companions themselves regard them. Again, in the case of the city and its citizens, the best person by far is the one who, in preference to a triumph at the Olympic games, or in any other military or more peaceful contests, would prefer to be famous for service to the laws of his own land, as someone who, throughout his entire life, rendered them more outstanding service <sup>729E</sup> than any other man.

Furthermore, when dealing with foreign people, he should bear in mind the special sanctity of contracts. For almost all offences against strangers, in contrast to those against fellow citizens, rely more upon god's vengeance, since the stranger, bereft of companions and kindred, is more at the mercy of gods and humans. So whoever is able to exact vengeance comes to his aid much more eagerly, and the one who is especially able <sup>730A</sup> to do so, is the daimon or god of strangers, the attendants of Zeus Xenios<sup>3</sup>. Anyone, then, with even a little foresight will go through life, to the very end, taking the utmost care to avoid committing any offence against strangers. What's more, the greatest offence against foreigners or fellow countrymen is, in each case, the one that affects supplicants of a god. For the god whom the supplicant called as witness when he entered the agreement, becomes the special guardian of this victim; so he would never suffer an offence without vengeance being exacted for the wrongs done to him.

<sup>730B</sup> We have now reviewed, quite comprehensively, all dealings with one's parents, with oneself, the city, friends and kindred, strangers and fellow countrymen. After this we need to describe what kind of person one should be, to live the most noble of lives. So we should proceed to speak, not of what the law brings about, but of what education achieves through praise and blame, in making each person more receptive and well disposed towards the laws we intend to enact: these are our <sup>730C</sup> next topics. Now of all goods, among gods and among humans, truth is the leader, and if anyone is to become blessed and happy, let him share in this from the very beginning so that he may spend as much of his lifetime as possible living as a man of truth. For such a man is faithful, but he who loves intentional falsehood is untrustworthy, and he who loves unintentional falsehood is a fool, and neither of these are enviable. For every untrustworthy or ignorant person is friendless and, as time passes, and he is recognised for what he is, in the challenges of old age, he isolates himself completely as life's end draws nigh. And so it makes no difference whether his companions or children are still alive or not, <sup>730D</sup> for he lives almost as if he has none.

Someone who does no injustice is worthy of honour but someone who does not allow the unjust to act unjustly deserves twice as much honour, nay more. For the former is worth as much as one person, while the latter, who discloses the injustice of others to the rulers, is worth as much as many others. But he who also does his best to assist the rulers in chastising the unjust, is a great and perfect man in the city, who should be awarded the prize for excellence, by popular acclaim. <sup>730E</sup> And the very same praise also applies to sound-mindedness and wisdom, and

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<sup>3</sup> Zeus, god of hospitality. One of Zeus' main domains is right and justice and he protects those outside ordinary human bonds such as strangers, suppliants, guests and beggars.

indeed, to any other goods which, once acquired, can be held by the person himself, and passed on to others too. Whoever passes them on should be honoured to the utmost, while second place should go to someone who wishes to do so but lacks the ability. But anyone who holds back, and does not willingly share any of the goods with anyone else, in a spirit of friendship, is someone <sup>731A</sup> who should, himself, be censured, while showing no less honour for the good he acquired, just because this fellow acquired it.

Every one of us should be ambitious for excellence, without a hint of jealousy, since a person like this makes a city great by exerting himself, personally, while at the same time, not impeding others by slandering them. But the jealous type, thinking that he has to get the better of others by slandering them, exerts himself less in pursuit of true excellence, and creates despondency among his rivals by criticising them unjustly. By doing so he makes a weakling <sup>731B</sup> of the whole city when it comes to competing for excellence and, for his part, diminishes its good reputation. Indeed every man should be spirited, and gentle too, as far as in him lies. For there is no escaping the dangerous, intractable and indeed entirely irremediable injustices of others, in any other way than by being triumphant in doing battle and defending oneself against them, and by relentless chastisement, and this is an impossible <sup>731C</sup> task for any soul devoid of noble wrath.

As for the injustices of those who act unjustly, but whose injustices can be remedied, we need to recognise, firstly, that no one who is unjust is deliberately unjust. For no one anywhere would ever deliberately end up possessed of the greatest evils, least of all in his own most honoured possession. And soul, as we have said, is, in truth, everyone's most honoured possession, so no one should ever deliberately take the greatest evil into this most honoured place and live his life possessed of that. Now the unjust person, who is possessed of evils, deserves unreserved pity, and in the case of someone possessed of remediable <sup>731D</sup> evils there is scope for pity, gentleness, and restraining one's anger, rather than raging bitterly like a shrew. But in the case of an evil and corrupt person who does not respond to any entreaties at all, it is necessary to let the anger loose. And that's why we say that it is appropriate and necessary for the good person to be both spirited and gentle, as the occasion demands.

The greatest of all evils, innate in the souls of most human beings, is one that everyone makes an excuse for, in his own case, and makes no effort to avoid. <sup>731E</sup> It consists in the assertion that every person is by nature, a friend to himself, and that this is the way things should be. But, the truth of the matter is, that the source of all faults in each person, in every case, lies in this intense self-love. For the lover is blind to the faults of the beloved, so he is a poor judge <sup>732A</sup> of what's just and good, because he believes he should always honour his own, above the truth. But a man who is to be a great man must cherish, not himself or what belongs to himself, but what's just, either in his own actions or indeed in the actions of others. From this same fault is born the universal conviction that our own ignorance is wisdom, and so we who, in a sense, know nothing, imagine that we know everything. And since we don't rely on others <sup>732B</sup> to do whatever we ourselves don't know, we inevitably make mistakes in doing this ourselves. That's why everyone must flee from this intense self-love, and always keep with someone better than himself, without feeling any shame in doing so.

But there are lesser precepts than these that are just as useful. They are frequently quoted and should be recited as a reminder to oneself. For there must always be some influx corresponding to any outflow, and memory is an influx of wisdom that had previously left the soul. <sup>732C</sup> That is why excessive laughter and tears must be avoided, and everyone should encourage everyone else in this. One should try to show composure by completely concealing all excessive joy and sorrow, whether our own daimon is set fair, or it turns out that we face an uphill struggle in

certain situations and the daimons face opposition. So we must have constant hope that the goods bestowed by God will lessen <sup>732D</sup> the pains that befall us, and change our present predicament for the better. And in relation to the goods themselves, we must hope that these, and good fortune too, will always be ours, rather than all these pains. Everyone needs to live with these hopes and constant reminders of all such precepts, unstintingly, clearly reminding both himself and his fellows, in work and in play.

At this stage, as far as divine considerations are concerned, we have dealt quite well with the activities that should be engaged in, <sup>732E</sup> and the sort of person each individual should be. We have not dealt with the human considerations so far, but we should do so, since we are discussing human beings, rather than gods. Pleasures, pains, and desires are most natural to humanity, and every mortal creature really is, in a sense, inevitably dependent and reliant upon such powerful influences. So we should praise the very best life, not only because of its superior outward <sup>733A</sup> reputation, but also because, if anyone is prepared to taste it, and not take flight from it in his younger years, it also proves itself superior in providing what everyone is seeking: more delight and less pain, all the days of our life. It is easy to show without doubt, that this will be the obvious outcome, provided such a life is tasted in the correct manner. But in what does the correctness consist? This is what we must now consider, guided by our argument.

We need to decide, by comparing the more pleasant life with the more painful, whether the life conforms to our nature in one case, and goes against our nature in another. We should proceed as follows: we want pleasure, and we do not choose pain, <sup>733B</sup> nor do we want it, nor do we want neither in preference to pleasure, but we do want this neutral state, instead of pain. We want less pain along with more pleasure, and we don't want more pain along with less pleasure, and when both are present in equal measure we find it hard to make a decision. And when it comes to desire, all these factors, and their quantity, magnitude, intensity and equality, and all the opposites of these, make a difference or do not make a difference <sup>733C</sup> to our choice in each case. Now with all these arranged as they must inevitably be arranged, the life in which there are lots of pleasures and pains, great and intense, and in which the pleasures predominate, is the one that we want; not the one where the pains predominate. Then again, when there is not much of either, and they are mild and minor, but the pains predominate, we don't want that life; but when pleasures predominate, we do. Furthermore, we should think of the life in which pleasures and pains are in balance just as we did earlier; we want it insofar as it involves a predominance of what we like, <sup>733D</sup> and we don't want it insofar as it involves a predominance of the opposite. We should, then, think of all our lives as bound, by nature, within these confines, and should think about the kinds of lives we naturally want. And if we assert that we want anything that lies outside of these confines, we are saying so out of ignorance and inexperience of the realities of our lives.<sup>4</sup>

So how many lives are there and what are they like? From among these a man must make his choice between the desirable and undesirable, by reviewing <sup>733E</sup> them, and turning his decision into a law, for himself. And by selecting, what he likes, and what's pleasant, what's noblest, what's best, at the same time, he should live the most blessed life available to humanity. Now

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<sup>4</sup> With the elaborate measurements detailed here Plato may well be revisiting the theme of *Protagoras* 356 and the puzzling treatment of pleasure in that part of the latter part of that dialogue: "...what would the salvation of our lives prove to be? Would it be skill in measurement, or the power of appearance? Or is it the latter power that sets us astray and makes us change our views back and forth so often, and regret our actions, and our choices of greater and lesser; while measurement, for its part, would have rendered this illusion powerless and, by revealing the truth, would have made the soul peaceful, abiding in the truth, and would have saved our life. So, in view of this, would the people agree that the skill of measurement would save us, or would it be a different one?" (356d-e)

we should say that the sound-minded life is one, as is the wise life, the courageous life, and the healthy one. And, as opposites of these four there are the lives of folly, cowardice, licence and disease. Whoever understands the sound-minded life, will count it as gentle in every respect, mild <sup>734A</sup> in its pains and pleasures, calm rather than frenzied in its desires and passions. The life of licence, however, he will count as harsh in every respect, intense in its pains and pleasures, impetuous and frantic in its desires, with passions that are mad in the extreme. And he will recognise that in the sound-minded life the pleasures exceed the pains, whereas, in the life of licence the pains exceed the pleasures in their scale, quantity and frequency. And so it follows, naturally and of necessity that one life proves to be more pleasant, the other more painful, <sup>734B</sup> and anyone who wishes to live pleasantly no longer has the option of living a licentious life, rather, as is obvious by now, if what we are saying is right any licentious person is, necessarily, licentious unintentionally. Indeed, it is either through ignorance or lack of self control or both that, the broad mass of humanity live lives devoid of sound-mindedness.

And we should think of healthy and diseased lives in the same way; they both involve pleasures and pains, but in health, the pleasures exceed the pains, and in disease the pains <sup>734C</sup> exceed the pleasures. Now our intention in choosing between lives is not that pain should be prevalent; the life we have adjudged most pleasant is the one where the very opposite is the case. So we would maintain that in the sound-minded life, both the desires and the pleasures are fewer, smaller and less frequent than in the licentious life, the wise than the foolish, and the courageous than the cowardly. But in each case, the former exceed the latter in pleasure while the opposite applies to pain. So the courageous life wins out over the cowardly, and the wise over the ignorant, and comparing the lives with one another, the sound-minded, the courageous, the wise, and the healthy are more pleasant than the cowardly, the ignorant, the licentious and the diseased. To sum up then, the life of excellence in body or soul is more pleasant than the life of degeneracy, and it is superior, in general, in its extraordinary beauty, rectitude, excellence and reputation, and it makes anyone who possesses <sup>734E</sup> this, happier in life than his opposite, in every respect.

Thus far, having presented the prelude to our laws, let's end that discussion here. After the prelude the "melody"<sup>5</sup> should, I presume, inevitably follow or, in truth, a sketch of the legal and civic arrangements. Now, to use an analogy, in the case of a web or any woven fabric, the woof and the warp cannot be made from the same thread, as the kind of thread used for the warp needs to be superior in terms of excellence. For the warp is tougher and has a certain firmness <sup>735A</sup> of character, while the woof is softer and, to an appropriate extent, yielding. On this basis, then, we should make a reasonable distinction, along similar lines, between those who hold positions of authority in our cities, and those whose education has been less testing. For there are, you see, two aspects of a political system: the appointment of individuals to positions of authority and providing those in authority with laws.

But there is something we need to think about before any of these matters. A shepherd, a neatherd, a horse breeder, or the like, taking charge of <sup>735B</sup> any herd, will never set about caring for them, until he has performed the appropriate purification on each community of animals. Having separated those that are healthy from those that are not, and the noble from the ignoble, he will send the second group off to various other herds, and care for the remainder. This is because he realises that such care would be a futile and never-ending exercise in the case of

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<sup>5</sup> As at 722E there is an untranslatable play here upon the word "nomos" which is a musical melody, tune or strain. The Greek word for law is also "nomos", hence the wordplay. This is contrasted with the musical prelude by which a melody may be introduced.

bodies and souls that have been corrupted by nature or <sup>735C</sup> poor nurture. He would recognise that the corrupt types will also corrupt those who are healthy and unblemished in body and in behaviour, in every herd, unless the existing stock is properly purified. Now in the case of the other animals, this is less important and only merits mention in our argument for the purposes of illustration. But in the case of human beings, it is of the utmost importance for the lawgiver to seek out, and proclaim, in each case, what's appropriate in relation to purification, and all of his other dealings <sup>735D</sup> with them. For instance, in the case of purifications of a city, many means of purification are available, some milder, some more severe, and the lawgiver who is also a tyrant would be able to use the severe purifications, which are also the best. But a lawgiver, without tyrannical power, when establishing a new political system or laws, would be content if he could effect even the mildest of purifications.

Yet the best method, like the best medicines, <sup>735E</sup> is painful, and it effects punishment by justice, combined with vengeance, which is taken to the ultimate point of exile or death, and usually rids the city of the most serious transgressors, who are incurable, and do her the greatest harm. The more gentle of the purifications might be described as follows: there are people who, from want of basic sustenance, show themselves ready <sup>736A</sup> and willing to follow their leaders in an assault by those who have not, on those who have. These are regarded by the lawgiver as a disease, sprung up in the city, and he banishes them in as kindly a spirit as possible to a colony in what he euphemistically calls "a removal". Now every lawgiver must, somehow or other, do this at the very outset but, for us, the present circumstances are even more straightforward, since, at the moment, we do not have to devise a colony or make a selection for the purposes of purification. In our case, it's as if waters from various springs and winter torrents <sup>736B</sup> are flowing together into a single pool, and we have to concentrate on ensuring that the converging water will be as pure as it can possibly be, by drawing it off in some cases, or channelling and diverting it in others.

There is, it seems, hard work and risk involved in any civic arrangement, but since our present endeavours are theoretical rather than practical, let's assume that the selection has been completed and that the purity has been satisfactorily secured. For once we have tested the bad people who are attempting <sup>736C</sup> to enter the city and live there as citizens, by means of extensive persuasion and sufficient delay, we may then refuse them admission. But we should welcome the good people in the best possible spirit of goodwill and graciousness.

Let's not overlook the fact that we ourselves have met with the same good fortune we referred to earlier in the case of the Heraclid colony<sup>6</sup>: escape from terrible and dangerous strife over land, the cancellation of debts and the distribution of property.<sup>7</sup> When a city, <sup>736D</sup> established of old, is compelled to legislate for such strife, it can neither leave things as they are, nor is it able to effect any change, so the only thing left is something like "aspiration," and gradual cautious change over many years, advancing little by little as follows: among the agents of change there should always be people who have acquired a lot of land, who have many debtors, and are willing to be reasonable <sup>736E</sup> and share wealth with those debtors who are in distress. So they forgive debts, and redistribute land, adhering somehow or other to measure, convinced that poverty consists, not in reduced wealth, but in increased greed. For this conviction is the greatest source of security for a city, and on such a firm foundation it is possible to build whatever political order may be constructed thereafter, appropriate to such an arrangement as

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<sup>6</sup> See Book III, 684e. The Heraclids were the Dorians who controlled Argos, Messene and Sparta.

<sup>7</sup> This significant issue is also referred to in Book III at 684d-e.

this, but when this transition <sup>737A</sup> falters, any subsequent political progress, in any city, will be fraught with difficulty.

Now although we say we have escaped this strife, it is only right to explain how we might have extricated ourselves, if we had not escaped it. So let us now declare that combining justice, with freedom from avarice, is the only means of deliverance; there is no other way out, broad or narrow, besides this, and we should let this principle be like a mainstay of our city. Indeed we should somehow or other ensure that property does not provide grounds for dispute <sup>737B</sup> among various parties, otherwise anyone with even a little intelligence will refuse to proceed, unless he has to, with a civic arrangement for citizens among whom there are disputes of ancient date. But God has given us a new city to found, one in which there are, as yet, no mutual enmities. So it would be the height of depravity and human folly if founders, in such a situation, were, themselves, to cause enmities through their distribution of land and houses.

<sup>737C</sup> Well then, what would be the correct way to make the distribution? First we must determine what the total size of the population should be. After this, we should come to an agreement on the distribution of the citizens, and the number and size of the subdivisions into which they are to be divided. Land and houses should then be distributed as equally as possible to these subdivisions. An adequate population size could not be correctly decided without referring to the land, and to the neighbouring <sup>737D</sup> cities. There should be enough land to sustain a particular number of sound-minded people, no more is needed. Their number should be sufficient to be able to defend themselves when they are being wronged by neighbouring peoples, and capable of giving some assistance at least, to their own neighbours when they too are being wronged. When we have surveyed their land, and neighbours, we shall define all this in practical terms with supporting arguments, but for now, our argument should proceed to complete our legislation, as a sketch and an outline.

<sup>737E</sup> Let's assume, as an appropriate number, that there are five thousand and forty landholders and defenders of the territory, and let the land with its houses be divided, likewise, into the same number of parts, so that the citizen and his allotment are counted together. Let the first division of the entire number be into two parts, then into three; in fact, it is naturally divisible also by four, five, and all successive numbers up to and including ten. This much then must be understood by every man <sup>738A</sup> involved in law-making: what number, and what kind of number, would be most beneficial to all cities. Let's choose the number that possesses the greatest amount of immediately consecutive subdivisions. Now although number as a whole contains all possible divisions for all purposes, five thousand and forty can be divided for military, or for peaceful purposes related to any contracts and joint endeavours involving taxation and grants, into fifty nine divisions and no more, the first <sup>738B</sup> ten being consecutive. <sup>8</sup>

Now all of these numerical relations should be thoroughly understood, at leisure, by those whom the law directs to do so. They are, indeed, as I have said they are, and not otherwise, and a founder of a city should be told these for the following reasons: when constructing a new city from scratch, or reforming an old and thoroughly corrupted one, in relation to its gods and those sacred places which should be founded in the city, and when deciding which of the gods or divinities each should be named after, no one in his right mind shall attempt to alter <sup>738C</sup> anything that is based upon guidance from Delphi, or Dodona, or Ammon<sup>9</sup>, or certain ancient accounts that convinced some people of apparitions that had taken place, or divine revelations

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<sup>8</sup> 5040 is divisible by all numbers from one to ten, but not by eleven. It is divisible by a total of 59 numbers. 5040 divided by 12 is 420.

<sup>9</sup> These are all prophetic centres, the first two are in Greece while Ammon is in Egypt.

that had been reported. Having been convinced, people established sacrificial practices, combined with rites, either from that very locality, or imported from Etruria<sup>10</sup>, or Cyprus, or somewhere else, and on the basis of such reports, they consecrated oracles, statues, altars, and shrines, marking off sacred precincts for each of these, none of which should be changed in the slightest by the lawgiver. <sup>738D</sup> To each of the places a god, or daimon, or even a hero, should be assigned, and in the division of the land, special precincts and everything appropriate, should be assigned to them first. As a result, gatherings of the various parts, taking place at regular intervals, would provide an opportunity for people to satisfy all kinds of needs, and develop a friendly spirit towards one another, thanks to the sacrifices, and become familiar, and get to know one another, and there is no greater good for a city than people knowing one another. <sup>738E</sup> For where people are in the dark about one another's characters, and they have no light, no one will ever get the honour he rightly deserves, or the positions of authority, or the justice he is entitled to. So every citizen, in every city, should strive above all else to ensure that he himself never proves false to any man, is always simple and true, and never falls foul of deception by anyone else.

<sup>739A</sup> Now our next move in the settling of the laws is an unfamiliar one, somewhat akin to a draughts player departing from the sacred line, and it will probably cause surprise at first hearing. Nevertheless, through reflection and experience, it will be evident that a city is likely to be founded in but the second best way. Yet someone might, perhaps, refuse to accept this because he is not familiar with a lawgiver who does not have tyrannical power. But the most correct course of action is to describe the best political system, then the second best, and then the third best, and, having done so, leave <sup>739B</sup> the choice to the person in charge of the settlement. So, let's follow this procedure now, and describe the political system that is first in excellence, then second, then third. The choice, for now, should be given to Cleinias, and if anyone else ever, at any stage, when faced with a selection between such alternatives, wishes to adopt what he likes from his own native land, he too should be allowed to do so, in his own way.

The foremost city, with the most excellent<sup>739C</sup> political system and laws is one where the ancient maxim prevails, as widely as possible throughout the entire city, that friends really do have all things in common. So this principle, whether it applies somewhere, now, or will ever apply in the future, means that women are in common, children are in common, and all possessions are in common too, and what we call "private" is entirely eradicated, by all possible means, from every aspect of life, and it has been contrived, as far as possible, that even what is naturally private such as eyes, ears, and hands, seem to see, hear, <sup>739D</sup> and act in common, and what's more, everyone expresses their praise and criticism, as one, insofar as this is possible, being delighted or pained by the same things. Those laws which unify the city as much as possible set the standard, and no one will ever suggest an improvement on these by proposing any other standard, better or more conducive to excellence. And whether a number of gods, or the sons of gods, manage such a city, they dwell there in this way, living lives of good cheer. <sup>739E</sup> Hence we should not look anywhere else for an ideal political system, but should hold to this and do our best to seek out the one that is most like this one. The political system we have just attempted would, if it ever came into existence, be closest to immortality, and second in terms of unity; after these two, we shall, God willing, consider the third best. At the moment the question for us is: what is this second best and how would it come to be like this?

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<sup>10</sup> In Italy.

First then, let them portion out the land and houses, and not work the land in common, <sup>740A</sup> since an undertaking of this sort is beyond their present birth, upbringing and education. But let the division be made based on the principle that the person who is allotted a portion should regard this as the common property of the entire city, and since the region is his fatherland, he should care for it more than a mother for her children, as the earth, being a goddess, is the mistress of all mortal creatures. And he should hold the same idea too in relation to the gods and daimons of the locality.

<sup>740B</sup> And so that this state of affairs may persist for all time the following precepts should be added: the number of hearths, as we apportioned them at the outset, should always remain at this number, and neither increase nor decrease, at all. The way to ensure that such an arrangement is fixed, in the case of any city, is as follows: whoever has been allocated the portion is always to leave after him, from among his own children, whichever one he most prefers, a single inheritor of this holding, his successor too in attending to <sup>740C</sup> the gods of the family and city, be they alive or already deceased by then. As for the other children, when someone has more than one child the female children should be given in marriage under a law, yet to be instituted, while the males are to be allocated, as sons, to fellow citizens who have no offspring, preferably on terms of friendship.

But there may be cases where friendly arrangements are not available or there are too many children, male or female, or where, on the contrary, there are too few, due to infertility. <sup>740D</sup> In all these cases the most important and revered official we have appointed, having considered what should be done about the excesses and deficiencies, shall contrive, as best he can, some means whereby the five thousand and forty holdings will always be constant. There are many means of doing so, for there are various ways of curtailing procreation in cases where it is excessive, and, on the other hand, there are deliberate encouragements to having lots of children, through the respect or disrespect shown to young people, <sup>740E</sup> and through admonitions and words of warning from their elders. All of these means are capable of producing the outcome we refer to. And indeed, if, in the end, we fail completely to maintain the number of holdings at five thousand and forty, because the affectionate disposition of couples towards one another results in excessive growth in the city's population, and we are completely at a loss, an age old device is at our disposal, one we have often mentioned: sending out colonies, suitably constituted, in a spirit of friendship on both sides. But if, on the contrary, some wave of disease ever deluges us, <sup>741A</sup> or we are struck by the ravages of war, and fall below our appointed number because of the loss of life, we should never, unless forced to do so, take in citizens who have been poorly educated; and yet, as the saying goes, even God cannot stand against necessity.

Let us imagine then, that our present argument is advising us in the following terms: O most excellent of all men, never relent in your respect, according to nature, for likeness, equality, sameness, and agreement, based upon number and any power belonging to things noble <sup>741B</sup> and good. In particular now, guard, first and foremost, the number, as declared, throughout your entire life, then respect the level and extent of your wealth, as allocated to you initially, in due measure and don't dishonour it by its purchase and sale among yourselves, or else you won't have the lot, which is a god, as your ally, nor the lawgiver either. For, firstly, in the case of someone who is disobedient, the law now gives a direction, by saying, initially, that whoever wants to, is to take the lot <sup>741C</sup> on the following conditions or not take it all: first that the land is sacred to all the gods, secondly that the priests, and priestesses shall offer prayers at the first, second and third sacrificial offerings. Whoever buys or sells allotted buildings and land is to suffer the appropriate penalties, which the officials shall inscribe on cypress wood memorials,

and place in the sacred places as a record for the future. What's more, they will give<sup>741D</sup> oversight of these matters, to ensure their observance, to whichever authority seems most keen sighted, so that any departures from these directions, that occur from time to time, may not escape their notice and they may punish whoever disobeys the law, and God. Just how good the present injunction actually is for all the cities that obey it, provided the appropriate arrangement has been adopted, "no one bad will ever know", as the proverb says, but only someone who has become <sup>741E</sup> experienced, and reasonable in his behaviour. In fact under such an arrangement as this money making is largely absent, and consequently, no one is either required or allowed to make money from any vulgar commercial activities, insofar as any so called base and reprehensible occupation subverts free character, nor would anyone sink so low as to amass a fortune from such occupations as these.

Furthermore, an additional law follows from these directions, stating that no private citizen is allowed to <sup>742A</sup> hold any gold or silver, but only coinage for the purposes of the day to day exchange which is more or less unavoidable in the case of craftsmen and anyone at all who needs to pay wages of this sort to wage earners, be they slaves or foreigners. For these purposes, we maintain, they need to have a currency that is valuable among themselves but has no value to other peoples. And there is to be a common Greek currency for use on foreign campaigns and expeditions, such as embassies, or any <sup>742B</sup> other necessary missions on behalf of the city, where there is a need to send someone abroad: for these purposes it is necessary that the city always holds a common Greek currency. And if it ever proves necessary for someone to go abroad for private reasons, he should travel, having secured the permission of the officials, and if he comes back home with surplus foreign money from that place, let him deposit this in the city coffers and receive the equivalent in local currency in return. And if someone is found to be keeping the funds for himself, they should be confiscated by the state, and anyone who is aware of this, and says nothing, is to be cursed and reproached, along with the person who brought in the money and, in addition, <sup>742C</sup> incur a fine not less than the amount of foreign currency involved. When marrying or giving in marriage, let no dowry whatsoever be given or received, let there be no depositing of money with someone who is not trusted, and no lending at interest either, as this permits the borrower to repay neither interest nor principal to the lender, at all.

Whoever considers these practices in the right way, by referring to their principle and intention, would come to the conclusion that these <sup>742D</sup> are the best practices for the city to adopt. We maintain that the intention of the reasonable statesman is not what most people say it is. They would claim that the intention of the good lawgiver should be that the city he legislates for, so benevolently, be as great as it can possibly be, and as wealthy as possible too, possessing silver mines and gold mines, and ruling over as many peoples as possible by land and by sea. And they would add that someone <sup>742E</sup> who legislates in the correct manner should intend that the city be as excellent and as happy as possible. Now some of these objectives are possible, while others are not possible, and whoever is organising things will intend what's possible and will not entertain vain intentions, nor attempt what's impossible. Now it is well nigh inevitable that happiness and goodness go together, so he would want this combination. But the combination of extreme wealth with goodness is impossible, based at any rate, on the popular definition of wealth. And most people say that the wealthy are the rare few who acquire possessions that are worth a lot of money, which are just what a bad person would <sup>743A</sup> acquire.

But if this is the situation, I would never agree with them that the wealthy person is, in truth, happy, unless he is also good; but being exceptionally good and being exceptionally wealthy too, is impossible. "Why so?", someone might perhaps ask. Because, we would reply, what's

acquired from a combination of just and unjust actions is more than double what's acquired from just actions alone, while the expenditure of someone who is unwilling to spend either in a good way or in an ignoble way is less, <sup>743B</sup> by half, than that of good people who are willing to spend on what's good. Therefore those who acquire twice as much, and spend half as much, would always be wealthier than those who do the exact opposite. And although the second of these fellows is good, the other is not evil as long as he is frugal; but on occasion he is utterly evil, although, as I have just said, he is never good. For whoever acquires in a just way and in an unjust way, and spends neither in a just way nor in an unjust way, is wealthy as long as he is also frugal, but the utterly evil person, being, for the most part, beyond redemption, is extremely poor. But someone who spends on <sup>743C</sup> what's good, and acquires only from just actions, would never, easily, become exceptionally wealthy or extremely poor either. And so our argument is correct to say that the very rich are not good, and since they are not good they are not happy either.

Now the intention of our laws is that the citizens be as happy as possible and as friendly to one another as possible. But the citizens could never be friends where they take lots of legal actions against one another, <sup>743D</sup> and injustice proliferates, but only where these are minor and very infrequent. We maintain, then, that there should be neither gold, nor silver in the city, nor should there be a lot of money-making from base activities, nor from interest, nor from fattening deformed livestock; but only as much as land-cultivation yields or provides, and only so much that people do not get absorbed in money-making and neglect the natural objects of the wealth which are soul and body, and these are of no account, ever, in the absence of physical training and education in general. <sup>743E</sup> That's why we have said, not just once, <sup>11</sup> that the pursuit of wealth should occupy last place in the scale of honour. For although every human being has three general concerns, concern with wealth pursued in the right way, is third and last in the scale, concern with the body is second, but first in the scale is concern for the soul. And indeed, if the political system we are now describing were to assign honours according to this scale, it would have enacted its laws in the right way. But if any of the laws enacted afterwards turns out to be granting more honour to health than to sound-mindedness, <sup>744A</sup> or more honour to wealth than to health and sound-mindedness, the enactment is patently flawed. So the lawgiver should ask himself, on a regular basis: what is my intention and, am I achieving this or missing the mark? And in this way, he would, perhaps, complete the task of legislation, himself, and relieve others of that responsibility: there is no other way whatsoever to do so.

Let the person who has been assigned a lot, hold it then, as we say, under the conditions <sup>744B</sup> we have outlined, and it would be good if each person who arrived in our colony also had all their other possessions equal. But since this is impossible, and one person will arrive with more wealth, another with less, it is necessary for various reasons, and for the sake of equality of opportunity in our city, that there be unequal property valuations. And so, positions of authority, taxes and grants would reflect the honour that each person deserves not merely on account of his own excellence, or that of his ancestors, or <sup>744C</sup> his physical prowess and good looks, but also because of how much wealth a person does or does not have. And they obtain honours and positions of authority on as equal a basis as possible, by measured inequality, and there would be no quarrelling. For these reasons we must create four property qualifications on the basis of size, called the first, second, third and fourth, or by some other names, to be used when people remain in the same valuation, or change <sup>744D</sup> from being poor to being wealthy, or from being wealthy to being poor, and end up in the valuation appropriate to themselves.

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<sup>11</sup> See *Laws* I. 631C, *Laws* III.697B.

The kind of law I would enact as a consequence of these considerations would be this: according to us, it is necessary, in a city that is to avoid the virulent disease, which might more correctly be called division rather than faction, that there be neither grievous poverty nor extreme wealth, both of which give rise to both outcomes. So the lawgiver now needs to declare some limit for each of them. Let the limit of poverty then be the value of the lot,<sup>744E</sup> this must remain, and no one in authority or any other citizen who aspires to excellence, should ever ignore any reduction of this, in any case, nor should any other citizen who aspires to excellence. Having put this measure in place, the lawgiver will allow some to acquire twice, three times or even as much as four times this measure. But if anyone acquires more than this by discovery, as a gift, or from commerce, or has come into possession of wealth, in excess of the measure, by some other good fortune of this sort,<sup>745A</sup> he shall keep his good reputation and his innocence if he hands the surplus over to the city, and the gods of the city. But if someone disobeys this law, anyone who wishes may disclose the fact, in return for half the surplus, while the offender shall pay, out of his own resources, a fine equal to the surplus, and half shall go to the gods. Everyone's resources, in their entirety, apart from the lot, shall be recorded in writing in a register, guarded by officials appointed by law, so that legal disputes relating<sup>745B</sup> to any property issues may be straightforward and transparent.

After this, the lawgiver should first situate the city, insofar as this is possible, in the middle of the territory, choosing a location possessing all the other advantages that are relevant to the city, which are not difficult to recognise or describe. Next he should make a division into twelve parts, having first assigned a sacred precinct to Hestia,<sup>12</sup> Zeus, and Athena, called the Acropolis, enclosed in a circle, from which he will make the twelve divisions of the city itself, and the entire territory.<sup>745C</sup> The twelve parts are to be equal in the sense that the parts consisting of good land are to be small, while those consisting of poor land are to be larger. He is to mark off five thousand and forty lots, each of which is to be divided in two, forming a single lot with two sections, a near one and a far one, the part near the city being paired with one nearest the boundaries, the second<sup>745D</sup> closest to the city with the second closest to the boundaries, and so on. And in the twofold divisions we should arrange the proportion of poor and good soil that we just referred to, by balancing the relative sizes of the distributions. The lawgiver should divide the people too into twelve subdivisions, arranging the distributions so that the rest of the wealth<sup>13</sup> of the twelve parts is as equal as possible, and ensuring that everything is duly recorded. And indeed, he will then assign the twelve divisions to twelve gods, naming and consecrating<sup>745E</sup> each allotted part to the particular god, and calling it a tribe. What's more, the twelve divisions of the city are to be divided in the same way that the rest of the territory was divided, and each citizen is to be allocated two dwellings, one near the centre and one close to the borders. And so the settlement will be completed.

But there is something we need to recognise fully: all the arrangements we have outlined are unlikely, ever, to encounter such favourable conditions that everything falls into place just as described. This would require people who are not resistant to a community of this sort, who will put up with lifelong regulation and control of wealth, the restrictions we have described on producing children, and being deprived of gold and anything else which the lawgiver, on the basis of what has just been said, is obviously going to prohibit. And it would require a central position for the city, with dwellings distributed all over the surrounding countryside, as

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<sup>12</sup> Hestia, goddess of the hearth, was worshipped in every household and in all temples. She has no mythological story and remains always in Olympus.

<sup>13</sup> "The rest of the wealth" refers to wealth apart from the land allocation which is called "the lot".

we said, speaking as though in a dream, shaping some city and its citizens as if they were made of wax.

Such reservations <sup>746B</sup> are, in a way, not wide of the mark, so the lawgiver should take up the argument again, as follows: he will say; my friends, in these discussions, do not presume that I am unaware that there is some truth expressed in what is now being said. Actually in dealing with any future course of action, I think it best that the person pointing out the ideal approach, the one to be adopted, should never forsake perfect beauty and truth. Anyone who finds it impossible <sup>746C</sup> to fulfil some aspect of these ideals should avoid that and abstain from that, and arrange instead to proceed with whatever aspect is closest to, and most akin by nature to that one, and is the most appropriate one to undertake. He should allow the lawgiver to finish outlining the ideal and, when this is done, only then are they to consider, together, which of his proposals are beneficial and what aspect of his legislation involves difficulties. For even someone who makes a most commonplace object must ensure <sup>746D</sup> that it is somehow entirely consistent with itself if he is to deserve any credit.

Now that we have decided upon the twelve part distribution we should focus intently upon one particular issue: the obvious way to arrange the twelve parts, each with numerous internal divisions, and those that depend upon them and arise from them, right down to the five thousand and forty holdings. From this come the tribes, demes, <sup>14</sup> villages, and also the battle-arrays and marching columns, <sup>746E</sup> and even the units of currency, dry measures, wet measures, and weights. So the law needs to arrange that all these are duly measured and consistent with one another. There is an additional fear that should also be dismissed: he is not to be afraid of a reputation for petty-mindedness if the law ordains that all the utensils that the citizens possess are to have a standard measure. The lawgiver is to regard it as a general principle that the numerical divisions and variations are useful in all cases, <sup>747A</sup> whether they vary among themselves, or there are numerical variations in lengths and depths, or indeed, in sounds and movements, whether they are up and down in a straight line, or revolutions in a circle. Indeed the lawgiver, in the light of all this, must direct all the citizens, as best they can, never to depart from this systematic arrangement. <sup>747B</sup> For in the realm of economics, or in affairs of state, or in practical matters, no single subject in our education has such great power as the study of numbers. But its greatest benefit is that it awakens the person who is sleepy and stupid by nature, and makes him easy to teach, retentive, and intelligent, and because of this divine science, he makes progress far beyond his natural endowments.

All these branches of education, then, would turn out to be worthwhile and appropriate, provided you use further laws and activities to banish slavishness and greed from the souls of those who study them comprehensively <sup>747C</sup> and profitably. Otherwise you would unwittingly produce an out and out villain rather than a sage. Examples of this are to be seen nowadays in the Egyptians and the Phoenicians and numerous other races, due to the enslaving effect of their general activities, and their wealth, whether some corrupt lawgiver of theirs may have brought about this state of affairs, or some bad luck, <sup>747D</sup> or indeed some other natural factor like that came their way.

In fact, Megillus and Cleinias, there is something about location that we should not overlook; when it comes to producing people who are better and people who are worse, some places are superior to others, and we should not enact laws that go against these facts. Some locations bode well or ill due to variations in winds or sunshine, others because of their waters, others because the nutriment that springs from the soil, not alone provides <sup>747E</sup> better or worse food

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<sup>14</sup> “Deme” is often translated as “parish”, a collection of villages and the habitants.

for their bodies, but also has a similar effect on their souls. But most advantageous of all will be the localities where a heavenly breeze blows, and there are haunts of daimons who receive anyone who ever settles there, in a gracious or ungracious spirit. A lawgiver, possessed of reason, would consider locations like these, insofar as this is possible for a human, and would attempt to enact laws applicable to these places. So that's what you should do too, Cleinias, since you intend to settle a region: you must first turn your mind to issues of this sort.

**Cleinias:** Yes, Athenian stranger, what you are saying is excellent in every way: I must do as you say.

**End Book 5**