

# Plato's *Laws*

## Book 6

Translated by David Horan

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

<sup>751A</sup> **Athenian Stranger:** Well then, after all that has just been said your next task would presumably be the appointment of the various office holders in the city.

**Cleinias:** It would indeed.

**Ath:** There are two elements involved in the ordering of civic affairs. First is the appointment of office holders, and their areas of responsibility, and deciding how many there should be and the manner of their appointment. Second, once this has been done, comes the assignment of laws to particular officials, and deciding which laws, <sup>751B</sup> how many, and what sort, are appropriate to each. But before dealing with the selection let's pause for a moment and make a pertinent observation about this.

**Cle:** What is it?

**Ath:** As follows: it is presumably obvious to everyone that, although legislation is a major undertaking, if we put unfit officials in charge of good laws in a well-equipped city, not alone would no good come of them, and not alone would the city turn out to be <sup>751C</sup> a total laughing stock, but a good deal of harm and damage might be done to the city by these very laws.

**Cle:** Of course.

**Ath:** So we should bear this danger in mind when dealing with your constitution and your city. You see then, in the first place, that those who are rightly advanced to positions of power should be subjected to an adequate test, themselves and their family too, in each case, from their earliest years until the moment of their selection, and secondly, that the selectors, for their part, should have been reared in lawful habits, and well enough educated to be able to decide, in the right way, who deserves to be accepted as satisfactory, and who merits rejection as unsatisfactory. <sup>751D</sup> But in our particular case, where people have come together for the first time, and don't know one another, how would they ever be able to choose their rulers without making mistakes?

**Cle:** It would be well nigh impossible.

**Ath:** And yet, once the contest is underway, as the saying goes, no excuses are accepted, and that's the predicament in which you and I now find ourselves, since, as you say, yourself <sup>751E</sup> and your nine colleagues have eagerly promised the Cretan people to found this city and I, for my part, have promised to join in, <sup>752A</sup> with this story we are telling. And so as I am telling a story I would be most reluctant to leave it without a head, since it would look decidedly ugly, wandering about like that.

**Cle:** Excellent, stranger, well said.

**Ath:** Well, yes, but I shall also do my best to deliver on my promise.

**Cle:** Absolutely, let's do as we say too.

**Ath:** That's what will happen, God willing, if old age doesn't get the better of us at this stage.

**Cle:** <sup>752B</sup> God is likely to be willing.

**Ath:** Likely indeed, so let's follow God's lead and take note of something.

**Cle:** Of what?

**Ath:** The audacious and adventurous spirit in which this city of ours will now be founded.

**Cle:** What are you referring to and why exactly are you saying this?

**Ath:** See how glibly and confidently we are legislating for men devoid of experience, in the hope that they will eventually accept the laws we have now proposed. But this much, at least, Cleinias, is obvious to almost everyone, even to those without much <sup>752C</sup> wisdom: none of these men are going to accept the laws, readily, in the beginning. But what if we were, somehow, to bide our time until those who had tasted the laws in childhood, who had been reared under them and become sufficiently familiar with them, were to join in the process of selecting officials for the entire city? Well, if we could actually arrange this, and there was some correct manner or means of doing so, I believe that, after such a period of transition, a city that had been through such an education might be well assured of survival.

**Cle:** <sup>752D</sup> Yes, that sounds reasonable.

**Ath:** Well let's see, then, if we can provide ourselves with an adequate course towards this objective, as follows. For I maintain, Cleinias, that more than any other people in Crete, the Knossians should not merely show due reverence for the land you are now going to settle, but they should also be particularly careful to appoint the first office holders in the best and safest way possible. Now, although this would not be a major <sup>752E</sup> undertaking in other cases, in the case of the guardians of the laws, it is absolutely essential that we pay the utmost attention to their selection, first.

**Cle:** What course and what plan shall we devise for this purpose?

**Ath:** As follows: I declare, children of Crete, that because of your seniority over the other cities, the Knossians need to join the new arrivals to this colony in selecting a total of thirty- seven individuals, nineteen from among these people, and the remainder from among themselves. <sup>753A</sup> These eighteen, the Knossians, should present to this city of yours, including yourself as a citizen of the colony and one of the eighteen, who have been persuaded to join in, or compelled to do so with a measure of force.

**Cle:** But tell me, stranger, why do yourself and Megillus have no involvement in our constitution?

**Ath:** Athens is a city with grand notions, Cleinias, and so too is Sparta, and both cities are a long way off. But this is an appropriate role for you, in every respect, and the same applies <sup>753B</sup> to your fellow founders. Let's take it, for now, that what's most appropriate under our present circumstances, has been dealt with. But as time passes and the civic arrangement has stabilised, the selection of officials is to proceed somewhat as follows: all who bear arms as foot soldiers or cavalymen, and all who were involved in the military when they were of age and capable of doing so, are to join in the process of selecting the officials. The selection is to be made in a sanctuary

<sup>753C</sup> that the city holds in the greatest reverence and each voter should bring, to the altar of the God, a small tablet on which he has written the name of his nominee, his father, his tribe and the deme he inhabits, and he should add his own name too, including the same details. Anyone who wishes is allowed to remove any tablet whose details he objects to, and place it on public display for at least thirty days. Those in charge of the process shall present the three hundred top ranked tablets for scrutiny by the entire city, <sup>753D</sup> and each citizen, in like manner, is to vote, once again, for whoever he wishes. The top one hundred of them, from this second vote, are to be displayed again for all to see. On the third occasion anyone who wishes, is to vote for any one of the hundred he favours, proceeding through sacrificial victims as he does so. The thirty-seven who receive the most votes should then be subjected to scrutiny and appointed to positions of authority.

But in this city <sup>753E</sup> of ours, Cleinias and Megillus, who will make all these arrangements, relating to office holders and their scrutiny? We recognise that some such people are needed in cities that are in the initial stages of their formation, but who would they be when no relevant office holders are available? And yet, somehow or other they are needed, and these should be no ordinary fellows but the very pinnacle of men. For as the saying goes “the beginning is half of any task”, and indeed everyone always praises a good beginning. But, in my opinion, the beginning is more than half <sup>754A</sup> the task, and no one has yet lavished sufficient praise on a good beginning.

**Cle:** Quite right.

**Ath:** Well, now that we have recognised this fact, let’s not move on without discussing it, to clarify for ourselves how this beginning is to be made. However, I, for my part, do not have much to contribute apart from one comment which is both essential and expedient to the current issue.

**Cle:** Which is?

**Ath:** I maintain that this city we are about to settle has, as it were, no father or mother, apart from the actual city <sup>754B</sup> that is founding it, although I am not unaware of the fact that lots of colonies have often been, and will be, at variance with their founding cities. Yet at the moment our city is still like a helpless child who, even if he is going to fall out with his parents some day, loves them and is loved by them, and is always running back to his relatives, and finds allies in these alone. This arrangement, I maintain, is already in place between the Knossians and the new city <sup>754C</sup> thanks to their care, and between the new city and Knossos. So I repeat what I said just now, for there’s no harm in saying something worthwhile twice: the Knossians must play a role in looking after all these matters by picking at least one hundred of the new arrivals, the eldest and the best they can find, and let there be another hundred from the Knossians themselves. These people, I say, are to go to the new city and join in the process of ensuring that the various officials are appointed <sup>754D</sup> according to law, and are subjected to scrutiny once appointed and, when this has been done, the Knossians should dwell thereafter in Knossos, while this new city tries to sustain itself and thrive. As for those who belong to the thirty-seven, these should have been appointed, now and for all time hereafter, with the following responsibilities: firstly, they are to be guardians of the laws, secondly, of the records wherein each citizen writes down the extent of their own wealth for the city officials, except for four mina in the case of someone with <sup>754E</sup> the greatest property valuation, three mina for the second greatest, two mina for the third, and one for the fourth. And if anyone is found to possess anything over and above what was declared in writing, the entire sum is to become public property. What’s more, anyone who wishes is allowed to prosecute him on a charge that involves neither credit nor honour, but only disgrace if he is convicted, because he despises the laws for the sake of gain. So anyone who wishes may charge

him with base profiteering and prosecute him before the guardians of the law themselves. And if the defendant is found guilty, he may not share in the common wealth, and whenever some distribution of wealth is made by the city, <sup>755A</sup> he is to get no share, apart from his original lot. His conviction is to be recorded where, for the rest of his life, anyone at all may read the details.

A guardian of the laws is to hold office for no more than twenty years, and he should be at least fifty years old when he takes on the role. If he assumes office at the age of sixty, he is to hold office only for ten years. And based upon this principle, once a man is over <sup>755B</sup> seventy, he should no longer expect to hold office alongside these officials, and occupy such an important position.

Let's take it then that these are three responsibilities applicable to the guardians of the laws. As the process of legislation proceeds, each new law shall impose further duties upon these people, for which they should be responsible in addition to those we have mentioned. But we should now deal with the selection of the other office holders, in due order. In fact, we should select generals next and their various assistants in warfare: <sup>755C</sup> those in charge of cavalry, or tribes, and commanders of companies of foot soldiers from the tribes, to whom the title "company commanders" is particularly appropriate, which is indeed what most people call them. Of these, the guardians of the laws are to nominate generals, from the citizens of this very city, and everyone who is currently involved in the armed forces, or has been involved, when of age, is to make the selection from the nominees. And if anyone thinks someone who has not been nominated is better <sup>755D</sup> than one of the nominees, he shall name his candidate and the nominee who is to be replaced, swear an oath to this effect, and nominate the other person instead. Whichever of the two is decided upon by a show of hands is to be included in the selection. The three who receive the most votes are to be generals, with responsibility for military affairs, once they have passed the same scrutiny as the guardians of the laws. The chosen generals, shall <sup>755E</sup> nominate twelve company commanders for themselves, one for each tribe, and the counter nomination procedure, the election, and the scrutiny shall be the same for the company commanders as for the generals. This gathering, prior to the selection of a council and its presiding committee, shall be convened, in the interim, by the guardians of the laws, situated in the most sacred and most spacious location available, with one place for the hoplites, another for the cavalry, and a third for any remaining members of the armed forces. The generals and cavalry commanders are to be elected by everyone present, the company commanders by those who carry a shield, <sup>756A</sup> and their tribal commanders are to be chosen by the entire cavalry, while the generals are to appoint, for themselves, the leaders of the light armed troops, of the archers, and of any other branches of the armed forces. So the outstanding issue is the appointment of cavalry commanders. These are to be nominated by the same people who nominated the generals, and the selection and counter nomination process is to be the same as it was for the generals. The cavalry are to vote for them, in full view of the foot soldiers, and the two who receive most votes are to be leaders of the entire cavalry. The voting may be challenged twice, at most. If anyone issues a third challenge, those responsible for counting the votes, in each case, should decide the matter by a vote among themselves.

The council is to consist of thirty dozen members, three hundred and sixty being a suitable number for the purposes of various subdivisions. These may be divided <sup>756C</sup> into four groups of ninety, ninety council members being elected from each of the four property valuations. First everyone must vote for members from the highest property valuation and anyone who does not co-operate is to be fined a specified amount. When these have been voted upon they are to be duly ratified. The next day they should vote for members from the second property valuation, following the same procedure as on the previous day. On the third day, anyone who wishes may vote for

members from the third property valuation, but voting is to be compulsory for those who belong to the three <sup>756D</sup> highest valuations, but anyone from the fourth and lowest valuation who does not wish to vote shall be exempt from any fine. On the fourth day, everyone is to vote for members from the fourth valuation, the lowest one, but those from the two lowest valuations who do not wish to vote shall be exempt from any fine, while anyone from the first valuation who doesn't vote is to incur four times the original fine, and anyone from the second valuation <sup>756E</sup> three times that fine. On the fifth day those in charge shall present the ratified names for all the citizens to see, and everyone is to vote once more for these, or be fined the original amount, thus selecting one hundred and eighty from each of the property valuations. Half of these shall then be chosen by lot and scrutinised, and these are to be the council members for that year.

The selection, conducted in this way, would maintain a mean between a monarchic and democratic constitution, and a constitution should always hold to this mean. For slaves <sup>757A</sup> and their masters can never become friends, nor can base folk and excellent folk, even if they are said to be equally deserving of respect. For to the unequals, the various equalities would become inequalities unless they hit upon the measure. Indeed because of these two, our civic arrangements are filled with faction. For the old saying is true, and it puts it most correctly and elegantly: "equality gives rise to friendship". But the saying really confuses us, because it is not very clear <sup>757B</sup> which precise equality is capable of bringing this about, for there are two equalities that have the same name but are, in practice, almost opposites in many respects. The other equality, of measure, weight and number can be applied through regulation by lot, by any city or legislator when awarding honours, in conducting the various distributions. But the truest and most excellent equality is not at all easy for anyone to see, for it is the judgement of Zeus, and although it imparts very little to humanity, everything it imparts to cities or to individuals <sup>757C</sup> produces nothing but good. For it allocates more to the greater and less to the smaller, giving due measure to each, according to their own nature. And indeed it also dispenses what's appropriate, in proportion, to each: always bestowing greater honours upon those whose excellence is greater, and less upon those in the opposite situation in terms of excellence and education. For this very justice, indeed, always constitutes, for us, the statesmanship for which we hunger, Cleinias, and with this equality in view, we should found the city that is now emerging. <sup>757D</sup> And if anyone ever founds another city he should enact the laws, aiming at this same objective, and not the interests of a bunch of tyrants, or just one, or indeed some democratic power group, but what's just, always, and this is what has now been described: the natural equality that is consistently given to unequals. Nevertheless it is inevitable that every city will have to apply these principles in a modified sense, if it is going to avoid being embroiled in internal factions, somewhere. <sup>757E</sup> Equity and forgiveness, you know, are always a departure from perfection and precision, and a deviation from strict justice. Therefore because of discontent prevalent among the general population, it is necessary to make further use of the equality of the lot, and then call in prayer, upon God and good fortune, to guide the fall of the lot, for them, in the direction of the perfectly just outcome. And although it is indeed necessary to make use of both equalities, in this way, we should use <sup>758A</sup> the other one, the one that involves good fortune, as seldom as possible.

This is what a city needs to do, for all these reasons, if it is going to be saved. Since a ship sailing the seas needs to keep constant watch, day and night, so too a city, in like manner, battered by the waves of other cities, and living in peril of being overtaken by conspiracies of all sorts, needs a day long and <sup>758B</sup> night long succession, connecting one official to another, as guardians hand over to guardians, continuously, without interruption. Now it is never possible for a large number of

officials to carry out any of these duties efficiently. No, the city needs to allow most of the council members to remain at home, most of the time, and attend to their own domestic affairs. They should appoint a twelfth part of them, to act as guardians <sup>758C</sup> for one month, distributing twelve parts over the twelve months of the year. These are to meet readily with anyone who comes from some other place, or even from the city itself, wishing either to make a statement relevant to the city's dealings with other cities or, on the other hand, to obtain some information. When the city puts questions to other cities, they are to receive the replies. And, most importantly, on account of the great variety of innovations that tend to occur in a city on a regular basis, they are to act as guardians so that, ideally, <sup>758D</sup> these never occur, and if they do occur, whatever has happened is remedied, and the city is made aware of it, as quickly as possible. For all these purposes this twelfth part must always be the part of the city that presides, and is responsible for convoking and dissolving any meetings, be they routine, or the extraordinary ones that crop up occasionally in a city. So a twelfth part of the council would be the body that arranges all these matters, being off duty for the remaining eleven months of the year. But this part of the council must exercise its constant guardianship over the city, in conjunction with the other officials.

Now although this would be a reasonable way of arranging <sup>758E</sup> affairs within the city, what oversight and arrangements would apply to all the rest of the territory? Since the entire city and indeed the territory as a whole has been divided into twelve parts, shouldn't we appoint superintendants of the city's own roads, houses, public buildings, and harbours, of its market and springs, and indeed of its sacred precincts and temples, and everything of that sort?

**Cle:** Of course.

**Ath:** <sup>759A</sup> Let's say then that there should be servants, priests, and priestesses, for the temples. For the roads and public buildings and their good order, for ensuring humans and other animals don't act improperly both within the city boundary itself and in the suburbs, and so that proper conditions may prevail in the city, three kinds of officials must be selected: those concerned with the matters we just mentioned, being called city-police, those concerned with the good order of the market, market-police. Priests or priestesses of temples, who belong to hereditary priesthoods, <sup>759B</sup> are to be left as they are. But if, as is likely with such matters in the case of the initial settlers, there are priests for none, or for very few of the temples, then, priests and priestesses should be appointed to act as servants of the gods, for temples without an established priesthood. Of all these appointments, some should be by election, others by lot, thus mixing the democratic element with its opposite in every territory and city, with their mutual friendship as the objective, so that they may be like-minded, as much as possible. When it comes to the priesthoods, we should allow God to bring about what is pleasing <sup>759C</sup> to Himself, by entrusting the matter to the divine chance of the lot. But he to whom the lot falls is to be scrutinised, first for integrity and legitimacy, and then for descent from houses that are, as much as possible, pure and untainted by slaughter and all such transgressions of divine precepts, in his own life and the lives of his father and mother. The laws concerning all divine matters are to be brought from Delphi, and they should make use of them, once they have appointed interpreters of these oracles. <sup>759D</sup> Each priesthood is to be for one year and no longer. And whoever is to perform holy rituals, adequately, in accord with our sacred laws about divine matters, should be at least sixty years old, and the same regulations should apply to the priestesses.

In the case of interpreters, four tribes are to vote three times to elect four people, each from themselves, and after testing the three who receive most votes at each election, they are to send

the nine names to Delphi for the oracle to designate one from each group of three. The scrutiny of these three and their age limit, <sup>759E</sup> is to be the same as for the priests. They are to be interpreters for life, and in the case of a vacancy it is to be filled by the four tribes from which the person is missing.

There should be treasurers in charge of the sacred funds for each of the temples and the precincts, and their products and rents. Three people are to be chosen from the greatest property valuation for the greatest temples, two for the smaller and one for the most modest. Let the selection and scrutiny of these be conducted as it was for the generals. So, let these be the regulations relating to sacred affairs.

As far as possible, let nothing be left unguarded. The guardianship of the city is to be exercised as follows: it is to be looked after by generals, commanders, cavalry commanders, tribe leaders, and presidents, <sup>760B</sup> and also by city and market police once we have selected and duly appointed them. The rest of the country, as a whole, is to be guarded as follows. Since the entire territory has been divided, as best we could, into twelve equal parts, one tribe should be assigned by lot to each part on an annual basis, and the tribe should provide five men to act as rural police and guard leaders. Each one of the five is to be responsible for picking twelve young <sup>760C</sup> people from their own tribe, who are over twenty five years of age and under thirty. The twelve parts of the territory should be assigned, by lot, to these young men, one part to one group, each for one month, so that all may become experienced and knowledgeable of the entire territory. Both the guards and their leaders shall carry out these functions for two years. Under the supervision of the guard leaders, beginning with the part of the territory allocated by lot, they should always take the next portion of land, in exchange, each month, proceeding in a circle to the right, from west to east. After the first year, so that the guards, for the most part, don't have experience of the territory only during a single season of the year, but as much as possible, besides the territory, they get to know what happens in each region during each season, the leaders at the time are to lead them once more, in the opposite direction, from east to west, constantly <sup>760E</sup> changing location until they have completed their second year. In the third year there is to be a fresh selection of rural police and guard leaders: five leaders, each in charge of twelve guards. Whilst on duty in each region, they are to look after it as follows: firstly they are to ensure that the territory is as well defended as possible against enemies, by building embankments and digging trenches, as needed, using fortifications to defend, as best they can, against anyone who might attempt to despoil the territory or property. For these purposes they may employ the beasts of burden and household servants of the locality, using the animals as instruments, and taking charge of the servants, while doing their best not to intrude upon their domestic duties. In short, they are to make everywhere inaccessible to enemies, and as accessible as possible to friends, be they humans, beasts of burden, or cattle. They are to attend to the roads to ensure that they are as comfortable as possible, and to the rains sent by Zeus, to ensure that they benefit the land, rather than doing damage. So, as the waters flow from the high places <sup>761B</sup> into the mountain glens and hollows, they should channel the deluge with dams and canals so that the valleys either retain or absorb the rains from Zeus, forming streams and springs for the farms and the localities below, thus providing even the driest regions with an abundance of fresh water. By enhancing and beautifying the clear waters of a spring or a river with various plantations and structures, <sup>761C</sup> and by connecting streams through underground channels, they shall ensure abundance and plenty. And if there is a consecrated grove or enclosure in the vicinity, they may beautify it all year round by directing the flow through channels into the very temples of the gods. In all such places the young are to provide gymnasia for themselves and for their elders, equipped

with warm baths and plenty of dry <sup>761D</sup> seasoned wood for fuel, for the benefit also of those who are ailing, bodies that are worn out by disease and the toils of farm labour, glad to receive far better treatment than they would from an incompetent physician.

These activities and anything of this sort would enhance and benefit the various regions, as well as affording a pleasant recreation. The serious aspect of their business would be as follows: each group of sixty is to guard its own region, not only against enemies but also against those who claim to be friends. And if <sup>761E</sup> anyone, slave or free, foreign or fellow citizen, acts unjustly towards someone else, they are to act as judges for whoever claims to have been wronged. In minor cases, the leaders themselves, and in major cases, up to three mina in value, the leaders plus twelve of the guards must judge whatever one person alleges against the other. No judge or ruler should exercise judgement or authority without being subject to review, except for those who, like kings, pass the final judgement. And indeed, if these rural police, mistreat the people they are looking after, in any way, by imposing unfair levies, or attempting <sup>762A</sup> to seize or commandeer the property of those who work the land, without consent, or if they accept anything given to them as an inducement, or make distributions in an unjust manner, let them bear the censure of the entire city for yielding to such corrupting influences. For any other injustices they may perpetrate against the local people, up to a value of one mina, let them submit, voluntarily, to trial before the villagers or foreigners. And if they are unwilling to submit, on any occasion, convinced that they will escape trial by continually changing their location every month, whether the offence is major or minor <sup>762B</sup> the wronged party is to pursue his case in the public courts, and if he wins, he obtains twice the amount from the fugitive defendant who was so unwilling to submit to justice.

The leaders and the rural police, during their two years in office, are to have a lifestyle of the following sort: firstly, in each district <sup>762C</sup> there is to be a common mess in which a communal way of living is to be maintained by everyone. If someone is absent from common meals even for a single day, or sleeps elsewhere at night, without express orders from the leaders, or a situation where it is absolutely necessary, and the five decide to put him on report and display his name in the marketplace as a deserter from his post, let him incur disgrace for personally betraying the constitution, and let him be punished with blows, fearlessly, by anyone who comes across him and wishes <sup>762D</sup> to do so. And if one of the leaders themselves does something like this, himself, all of the sixty should attend to the matter, and anyone who is aware of this, or finds out about it, and takes no action, is to be held guilty under the very same laws, and be punished even more severely than the younger ones, by being stripped of all authority over the young. Let the guardians of the laws pay vigilant attention to all these matters to ensure either that lapses do not occur at all, or that they are penalised appropriately when they do. <sup>762E</sup> Indeed everyone should keep in mind, that no man alive who has not served, could ever deserve to become a master, worthy of the name, and we should pride ourselves more on serving well, than on ruling well, firstly as a servant of the laws, as this is service to the gods, secondly as young folk constantly serving their elders who have lived honourable lives. As well as this anyone who has joined the ranks of the rural police must have partaken of the meagre and sparse daily diet for those two years. In fact once the various twelves have been selected, they should resolve at a meeting with the five leaders that, being just like <sup>763A</sup> servants, they will not have other servants or slaves of their own, nor shall they make use of servants from the farmers and villagers of the area for their own personal purposes, but only for public purposes. And, in general, they should decide to live self-sufficiently, serving and being served by themselves, as well as conducting a thorough exploration of the entire territory, winter and summer long, always fully armed, for security purposes and to ensure constant familiarity <sup>763B</sup>



with each district. For it is surely a study as important as any, that everyone should know their own country, in detail, and the young should be involved in hunting with hounds and by other means, for this purpose, as well as for the general pleasure and benefit that everyone derives from this sort of thing. These are the people then, and this is the activity, and whether someone prefers to call them <sup>763C</sup> secret operatives or rural-police, or anything else, any man who intends to preserve his own city, competently, should turn his hand to this, eagerly, as best he can.

The next step for us, in selecting the various officials, would concern the city-police and the market-police. There should be three city-police corresponding to the sixty rural -police, dividing the twelve parts of the city into three, imitating their rural counterparts by looking after the roads within the city, and the avenues extending into the city from the country, and the public buildings too, to ensure <sup>763D</sup> that they are always constructed according to the relevant laws, and indeed the water supply that the rural police channel and pass on to them in such good condition. They must ensure that there is enough clean water flowing in the fountains, to beautify the city and to meet its needs. But these people must also have the ability and the leisure to look after public affairs, therefore every citizen is to nominate anyone he wishes, drawn from the highest property valuation, for the ranks of the city-police. When these have been voted upon, <sup>763E</sup> and they have arrived at the six names who received most votes, the responsible officials should select three of these, by lot, and once they have been duly scrutinised they are to assume office, subject to the laws prescribed for them.

Next there shall be a selection of five market-police, drawn from the second and first property valuations, the selection process, in general, being just as it was for the city-police. From the ten who receive most votes, they are to select five, by lot, and once these have been scrutinised, they are to declare them duly appointed. Everyone is to vote in every case, and whoever refuses to do so <sup>764A</sup> is to be fined fifty drachma if he is reported to the officials, as well as acquiring a bad reputation. Anyone who wishes may attend the assembly or a general meeting, but attendance is to be compulsory for members of the first and second property valuations, on penalty of a ten drachma fine for anyone found to have missed such meetings. Attendance is not to be compulsory for members of the third and fourth valuations, and they shall incur no penalty for non-attendance, unless the officials specifically order everyone <sup>764B</sup> to meet for some urgent reason. Now the market-police are to guard the good order of the market place, as directed by the laws, and they are to look after the temples and fountains of the market place too, so that no one commits any injustice. They are to punish anyone who acts unjustly, with blows and bonds in the case of a slave or foreigner, and if a local person is disorderly in these respects they may fine the offender up to one hundred drachma, on their own authority, or twice <sup>764C</sup> that sum when they pass judgement along with the city police. Let the same powers to fine and punish also be available to the city-police in their own jurisdiction, fining people up to one mina themselves and twice that sum when they act in consort with the market-police.

After this it would be appropriate to appoint officials in charge of music and of gymnastics, two kinds in each case: those responsible for education and those responsible for competitions. By education-officials the law means overseers <sup>764D</sup> of gymnasia and schools, responsible for their good order and standards of education, as well as the attendance and the accommodation of the boys and girls. By competition-officials it means judges of contestants in both athletic and musical contests, and again there are two kinds, those concerned with music and those concerned with athletic competition. It would be appropriate to have the same judges for competitions involving humans and for those involving horses, but the judges for those who perform on their own, such

as rhapsodes <sup>764E</sup> and those who play lyres or flutes or the like, should be different from those who judge choral performances. It is first necessary then, I presume, to select the officials responsible for the playful performance of choruses of men, boys and girls that takes place in dancing, and in our entire system of music. One official, who should be more <sup>765A</sup> than forty years of age, is enough for them. One official, who is more than thirty years of age, is also sufficient for the solo performances, to introduce the contestants and pass adequate judgement upon them. The official responsible for managing the choruses should be selected in the following manner. Those who have a keen interest in such matters are to attend a general meeting or be fined if they don't go. This should be decided by the guardians of the laws, but if any others don't wish to attend there should be no compulsion. The elector must make his nomination <sup>765B</sup> from those who have the relevant experience and, during the candidate's scrutiny, the one sole criterion for acceptance or rejection should be experience or inexperience. And whoever is selected from the ten who received most votes should, once he has been duly scrutinised, take charge of the choruses for a year in accordance with law. In exactly the same way whoever is chosen from those who have been judged, is to preside, for that year, over those who perform music on their own or in groups, once he has submitted to the decision of the judges. <sup>765C</sup> After these, judges must be selected for athletic competitions involving horses, and for those involving humans too, from the third and also the second property valuations. Attendance at the election is to be compulsory for the three top valuations, but the lowest valuation should be exempt from any fine. Let three people favoured by the vote of the scrutineers, be chosen from the twenty who had previously been selected. If anyone <sup>765D</sup> does not pass the scrutiny during any process of selection and appointment for any office whatsoever, others are to be selected instead, on the same basis, and they are to be subjected to scrutiny in exactly the same way.

In relation to the matters we have spoken of previously, we still have to appoint an official as overseer of the education of boys and girls, in its entirety. Let one person be responsible for them, in accordance with the laws, being at least fifty years of age, and the father of legitimate children, ideally of sons and daughters or, failing that, of one or the other. And let the chosen person himself, <sup>765E</sup> and whoever chooses him, regard this office as by far the most important of the very highest positions of authority in the city. Indeed in the case of anything that grows, plants, tame animals, wild animals <sup>766A</sup> or humans, the first shoots of growth, well begun, are the most significant factor in achieving their own natural and appropriate excellence. A human being is, we say, a tame animal, nevertheless a human who encounters the right education and has a benign nature, tends to become the most divine and gentlest creature of all, but if he is not given an adequate and noble upbringing, he tends to become the wildest creature that walks the earth. That's why the lawgiver must not allow the upbringing of children to become a secondary or incidental matter. And since it is imperative to begin by first selecting, in the right way, the person who is going to be responsible for the children, the lawgiver must do the very best he can to appoint someone <sup>766B</sup> who excels in every respect over his fellow citizens, and put him in charge of the children. Accordingly all the officials, except for the council and its committee, are to go to the temple of Apollo, and each must cast his vote in secret for whichever one of the guardians of the laws would, in his view, best take charge of educational matters. Whoever gets most votes and has been duly scrutinised by the other officials who elected him, apart from the guardians of the laws, is to rule for five years and in the sixth year there is to be a fresh election to this office by the same procedure.

If someone holding public office dies more than thirty days before the end of his term of office, someone else should be appointed by those who are responsible for this, following the same

procedure. And if a trustee of orphans dies, the relatives living in the vicinity, on the father's and mother's side, down to the children of cousins, must appoint another within <sup>766D</sup> five days or be fined one drachma per day each, until they appoint a trustee.

Of course any city in which law courts are not properly established would hardly constitute a city at all. And a judge who does not speak to us, and has nothing to add to what the litigants said in the preliminary hearing, as happens in mere arbitrations, would never be good enough as a judge of legal cases. For these reasons it is not easy for a large number of people to judge a case well, or for a few ordinary folk to do so either. The matter in dispute <sup>766E</sup> always needs to be made clear from both sides, and time taken through slow and repeated questioning, has the advantage of shedding light upon the dispute. For these reasons, those who are accusing one another should first have recourse to neighbours and friends, and those who are most familiar with the events in dispute, <sup>767A</sup> and if any party does not obtain an adequate judgement before these people, let him go to another court, and if these two courts are unable to resolve the dispute, a third court shall give a final judgement in the case.

Now, in a way, the establishment of the courts is also an election of officials, since any official also needs to be a judge of something or other, and although a judge is not a ruling official, he actually becomes, in a way, a ruling official of some significance on the day on which he decides a case by giving his judgement. Granting then that judges <sup>767B</sup> are also ruling officials, let's say who the right people for the role would be, what matters they should be judges of, and how many there should be for each particular case. Let the most authoritative court be the one that the parties each proclaim for themselves, making their selections together. Let there be two tribunals for the other cases, one when a private citizen accuses another citizen of doing him an injustice and brings him to court because he wants the issue to be decided, a second whenever someone believes that the community is being wronged <sup>767C</sup> by one of its citizens, and he wishes to come to the aid of his own people. We need to say who the judges are, and what they should be like. Firstly, however, we should have a common court for all private citizens who are in dispute with one another for the third time, set up more or less as follows. When a new year is about to commence in the month after the summer solstice, on the day previous to this, all the officials, whether they hold office for one year or for longer, should come together in a single temple. Having sworn an oath to the god, <sup>767D</sup> they are to dedicate, so to speak, one judge from each and every kind of office, who has the best reputation in each role and is likely to decide the various cases of his fellow citizens, best and most piously, for the coming year. Once these have been selected they must undergo scrutiny by the selectors themselves, and if anyone doesn't pass scrutiny, another is to be selected in the same way to replace him. Those who pass scrutiny are to act as judges for those who are seeking refuge from other courts, and their votes are to be cast openly. It shall be compulsory for council members and the other officials who elected them, to listen to the legal <sup>767E</sup> proceedings, and watch what happens, and others may attend too, if they wish. If anyone accuses a judge of deliberately deciding a case in an unjust manner, he should go to the guardians of the law and present his charge. A judge who is found guilty of such a crime is to pay double damages to the victim, and if a greater penalty is deemed appropriate those who are judging the case may impose a further punishment that he must suffer in addition, or some fine payable to the state or to the person who brought the case to court.

When it comes to crimes against the state, it is necessary, in the first place, <sup>768A</sup> to involve the public in deciding the case, since everyone is wronged when the city is wronged. So the people would be justified in feeling aggrieved if they had no involvement in deciding such cases. But

while the initial and final proceedings of such cases should be entrusted to the people, the trial itself should go before the three highest officials jointly accepted by the defendant and the prosecutor. And if the two parties are unable to agree on this together for themselves, the council should decide between the two alternatives. <sup>768B</sup> In fact everyone should, as far as possible, be involved in deciding private cases too, for anyone who is excluded from involvement in joint decision making, feels that he has no involvement at all in his own city. That's why there must indeed be courts based upon tribes, and judges appointed by lot, there and then, who are incorruptible in the face of personal pleadings when they pass judgement. But the final judgement is delivered by that court which, according to us, has been constituted completely free from corruption, insofar as this is humanly possible, for the benefit of those who are unable <sup>768C</sup> to obtain a resolution, either before the neighbours, or the tribal courts.

Now courts of law, we maintain, cannot easily be described as ruling officials, yet they cannot be denied such a title either, without some qualification, and although we have given a sort of outline sketch that describes some of the details, it largely omits others. For the best place, by far, for any detailed regulation and classification of legal cases would be at the end of the legislative process. So although these details should be asked <sup>768D</sup> to wait until the end of our process, the appointments to the other offices have, more or less, been legislated for, in full. But it is not possible, to confidently arrive at a comprehensive, detailed account of every single aspect of the administration of the city, and civic affairs in general, before concluding a detailed description from beginning to end, encompassing everything in between. So, this stage, where we have completed our description up to the point where the officials are elected, <sup>768E</sup> would be a suitable place to conclude the preceding matters and start proposing laws. We need no further hesitation or delays.

**Cle:** What you have said so far, stranger, is entirely acceptable to me, and now that you have connected the start of what you are going to say, with the conclusion of what has been said already, I am even more pleased than I was before.

**Ath:** <sup>769A</sup> Well it seems that our thoughtful old men's amusement has been well played, so far.

**Cle:** You seem to be pointing out how well executed the work of these men is.

**Ath:** Quite likely, but let's see if you agree with me on the following point.

**Cle:** What point? What are the issues?

**Ath:** You know how the work of painters on any of the figures they paint never seems to come to an end. It seems to go on forever, adding finishing touches that involve "colouring" or "decolouring", or whatever the professionals <sup>769B</sup> call such processes, and never reaches a point where the painting cannot be made more beautiful or realistic.

**Cle:** I understand what you are saying fairly well, from hearsay, although I have no direct experience of this sort of skill.

**Ath:** Well, that's no harm. But we may still use the example involving this skill, the one that has just occurred to us, as follows. If anyone ever decided to paint the most beautiful picture imaginable, one that, furthermore, would never deteriorate but would always improve with the passage of time, you realise that, since the painter is not immortal, his huge labour will have very short lived results, unless he leaves a successor behind him who can repair anything that happens

to the picture because of its age, and is also able, in future, to improve upon any deficiencies in the work due to the painter's own artistic weaknesses?

**Cle:** True.

**Ath:** <sup>769D</sup> Well then, don't you think that the lawgiver will want some such arrangement? Firstly, he'll want to frame the laws, as best he can, with the utmost precision. Secondly, as time passes and his plans are tested in practice, don't you think any legislator who isn't a fool, will realise that there must, necessarily, be countless deficiencies in his laws, which some successor will have to put right, so that the civic arrangement and good order <sup>769E</sup> of the city he is founding will constantly improve and never deteriorate at all.

**Cle:** Of course: every lawgiver will, presumably, want some such arrangement.

**Ath:** Now what if someone had some means of teaching another person, somehow, by his behaviour and his words, to come to some sort of understanding of how laws should be protected and corrected? Wouldn't he persist in explaining this until he succeeded in his objective?

**Cle:** <sup>770A</sup> Of course.

**Ath:** So, isn't that what must be done now, by me and by the two of you?

**Cle:** What do you mean?

**Ath:** Although we are about to make laws, we have selected guardians of those laws who are young in comparison with ourselves, we who are in the evening of life. So, as we say, we should pass laws ourselves and, at the same time, attempt as best we can, to turn these young people into lawgivers and guardians of the laws.

**Cle:** <sup>770B</sup> Indeed, if we are actually up to the task.

**Ath:** Well we should try with all our hearts.

**Cle:** How could we do otherwise?

**Ath:** Let's address them as follows then: Dear friends and preservers of the laws, we shall omit a great deal that is relevant to the various topics on which we pass laws, necessarily so. Nevertheless we shall do our best to include whatever is significant, and present the whole system in broad outline. You will have to fill in the details and you now need to hear what your objective <sup>770C</sup> should be, in doing so. Megillus, Cleinias and myself have stated this objective to one another many times, and we agree that our formulation is sound.

But we want you to be of the same mind as ourselves and to become our pupils too, looking to those very objectives which, according to us three, should be the objectives of the guardians of the laws, and the lawgivers too. Our consensus concerned one significant issue: how exactly <sup>770D</sup> someone may become a good person, possessed of the excellence of soul that is appropriate to a human being. In the case of any of our fellow citizens, male or female, young or old, this excellence comes from some activity or some habit or acquisition or desire or opinion, or instruction in certain subjects. To attain the excellence we spoke of, everyone is to exert himself to the utmost, throughout his entire life, and none should be found favouring anything else that keeps him from these activities. He should even be prepared to break with his own city if revolution proves inevitable, rather than submitting to lesser folk under the yoke of slavery, or abandoning his city

by going into exile. Everything of this sort must be endured rather than changing to a constitution that, by its very nature, makes people worse. This was our earlier consensus, and you must now look to these two objectives and pronounce your praise and censure <sup>771A</sup> of these laws of ours, censuring those that are unable to achieve these objectives, while you embrace and accept those that can do so, live by them in a spirit of friendship, and bid farewell to other activities that lead to other, so called, goods.

Let's make a start on the laws that follow these, beginning with sacred matters. In fact we must first take up the number five thousand and forty again, and how many convenient divisions we found <sup>771B</sup> contained, both in the number as a whole, and the number based on tribes, which we decided was one twelfth of the entire and, naturally, exactly twenty times twenty one. So, our entire number has twelve sub-divisions, and the tribal number also has twelve, and each portion should be regarded as sacred, a gift of God, corresponding to the months of the year and the revolutions of the universe. That indeed is why the innate nature of every city leads it to sanctify these divisions, although some have done their dividing more correctly than others, or have consecrated the division <sup>771C</sup> more propitiously. So we may now declare that we are perfectly right in choosing the number five thousand and forty, which contains all divisions from one to twelve, with the exception of eleven, and there is a simple solution even to this: for one way to solve the problem is to set two of the households aside, and it would not take a long story to prove the truth of this, if time allowed. For now, let's place our trust in the principle we have just stated, make this distribution, name each portion after a god or a child of the gods, and assign altars and whatever is appropriate to them, where we should have two gatherings per month, for sacrifices, twelve per annum for the tribal division, and twelve for the urban division itself. The first purpose of these shall be to ensure the favour of the gods and of all that belongs to them, and the second, according to us, is to ensure our mutual familiarity and acquaintance with one another, and community spirit <sup>771E</sup> in general. In fact, when it comes to marital contracts and connections, it is imperative that any ignorance of the woman's family, the woman herself, and the family she is entering, be eliminated, making every effort, as best we can, to make no mistakes at all in such matters. So even our games should be arranged to achieve this serious purpose, with dancing for boys <sup>772A</sup> and girls, which also allows them to be seen, and see one another, unclothed, within reason, on occasions that afford an acceptable pretext, subject to modesty and prudence on the part of each. Those in charge of the choruses should be the supervisors and organisers of all this, and lawgivers too, along with the guardians of laws, in relation to any directions we omitted. And it is inevitable, as we said, in all such matters involving lots <sup>772B</sup> of minor details, that the lawgiver will make omissions. So those who have ongoing experience of the laws, year in year out, should learn by practice to make corrections and changes, annually, until it seems that a point has been reached where regulations and practices of this sort have been defined adequately. A ten year cycle of sacrifices and choral performances would be a reasonable and sufficient time period to assign, for experience of each and every aspect. While the relevant lawgiver <sup>772C</sup> is still alive, they should work in consultation with him, but once he has died, the officials themselves, each reporting to the guardians of the laws, should correct any deficiency in their own area of responsibility until it seems that every detail has been resolved, well and truly. They should then declare the laws unalterable and, thereafter, administer these along with the other laws that the original lawgiver prescribed for them at the outset. Nothing relating to these laws should ever be changed deliberately, but if it ever seems necessary to do so, they are to consult all the officials, <sup>772D</sup> the general population, and the divine oracles, for advice and make the change if all are in agreement.

Otherwise, they are not to change them at all and, by law, any dissenting group shall always prevail.

So when any man, having turned twenty-five years of age, upon due consideration by himself and by others, believes <sup>772E</sup> he has found a bride that suits him personally, and is also suitable for companionship and for begetting children, he should marry, indeed everyone should do so before they turn thirty-five. But first he should be told how to find a suitable and fitting bride, for as Cleinias says, every law should be preceded by an introductory preamble of its own.

**Cle:** Well remembered, stranger, and you have, in my view, introduced the topic at just the right moment.

**Ath:** It's nice of you to say so. Now, to a young man, from <sup>773A</sup> a good family we should say the following: you should enter into the sort of marriage that meets the approval of sensible folk. These people would advise you neither to shun marriage to a poor family, nor chase eagerly after wealthy connections and, all other considerations being equal, always prefer to enter a union with someone who has less resources. For this approach would be beneficial both to the city itself, and to the families involved, since balance and proportion are much more conducive to excellence than unbridled excess. And someone who realises that he himself is too impulsive and hasty in all his actions should look for <sup>773B</sup> connections to a well behaved family, whereas someone with the opposite natural tendencies should pursue connections of the opposite sort. And there should be one rule for all marriages: each person is to seek a marriage that is beneficial to the city, not the one that pleases himself. Everyone is always drawn somehow, by nature, to a person who is most like himself, and so the city <sup>773C</sup> as a whole develops an imbalance of wealth and character traits. That's how the consequences we wish to avoid in our own city, certainly befall most other cities. Now to prescribe explicitly, by law, that the wealthy are not to marry the wealthy, the powerful are not to marry the powerful, that the slower characters have to look for marital unions with the quick witted, and the quicker with the slower, would not alone be ridiculous but would anger a lot of people. For it is not easy to appreciate that a city should be <sup>773D</sup> blended after the manner of a wine bowl, in which the wine, when first poured, seethes madly, but when it is restrained by the good company of another, more sober god, it forms a good, duly measured drink. Now it is virtually impossible for anyone to discern that this is happening in the case of the blending of children, and that's why we should omit such matters from our laws. We should try instead to charm each person into placing more value upon the equipoise of their own children, than the marital property equality which is insatiable, using words of reproach to deter anyone who is intent upon marrying for money, rather than forcing them via a written law.

Let these then be our exhortations about marriage, and also, indeed, what was said previously, that there is a need to preserve the everlasting nature by constantly leaving children and children's children behind us to serve God <sup>774A</sup> in our place. All this and even more could be said as an appropriate prelude concerning marriage and the need to marry. But if someone does not comply willingly but keeps himself aloof and isolated in the city and is still unmarried at the age of thirty-five, he is to incur an annual fine of a hundred drachmas if he belongs to the highest property valuation, seventy if he belongs to the second, sixty for the third and thirty for the fourth. The fine shall be dedicated <sup>774B</sup> to Hera. Anyone who does not pay annually is to owe ten times the amount. This should be enforced by the treasurer of the goddess, who is to owe the money himself if he fails to exact it, and everyone is to give an account of this matter at the audits. Let these be the financial penalties upon anyone who is not prepared to marry, and he should also be shown no

respect by the young folk, and none of them should heed him at all unless they have to. And if he attempts to punish someone, all are to come to the aid of the victim and defend <sup>774C</sup> him, and anyone present who does not assist should be declared by law, to be a coward and a bad citizen. We have already dealt with dowries but let's declare once again that it's not likely that our poorer folk will reach old age without ever receiving a bride or bestowing one, because of their poverty, since everyone in this city has everything they need, and so there would be less arrogance on the part of the wives, and less low and slavish servitude among the husbands, because of wealth. <sup>774D</sup> Whoever obeys this precept would have one meritorious deed to his credit, while anyone who disregards this by giving or accepting more than fifty drachmas towards the cost of the bride's dress, or one mina, one-and-a-half mina, or even two mina, depending upon their property valuation, is to owe this amount to the state, while the amount given or received is to be dedicated to Hera and Zeus. This should be enforced by the treasurers of these two gods <sup>774E</sup> and, as was said in the case of people who don't marry, the treasurers are to exact the sum in each instance or else pay the fine themselves.

The right of valid betrothal belongs first to the bride's father, then to her grandfather and thirdly to her brothers by the same father. If none of these are available, authority belongs next to her mother's family, in like manner, and in exceptional situations her closest relatives, acting along with the trustees, shall always have authority.

When it comes to the preliminary rites of marriage or any other ritual <sup>775A</sup> that it is appropriate to enact before during or after the event, the interpreters should be consulted and everyone should be of the view that all is well if he heeds their advice. As for the festivities, no more than five friends, male and female, should be invited from each side and the same rule should also apply to relatives and friends from either side. The expenditure should be proportionate to a person's wealth: one mina for the wealthiest, <sup>775B</sup> and so on, as their property valuation reduces. Everyone should praise the person who obeys the law, and the guardians of the law are to punish anyone who is disobedient, as a boor devoid of education in the strains of the marital Muse. Drinking to the point of drunkenness is not appropriate anywhere except at the festivals of the God who gave us the gift of wine, nor is it safe, especially for those who take marriage seriously, wherein it is most important for the bride <sup>775C</sup> and bridegroom to be sensible as they undergo such a significant change in their lives. This also ensures as much as possible that the offspring are always conceived from sensible parents, since the day or night when conception takes place, under God, is quite unknown. What's more, the begetting should not take place while the bodies are dissolved in drunkenness, rather the new life should be fashioned in quietude, well-formed, stable and peaceful. But when drunk with wine, a person reels about, borne <sup>775D</sup> hither and thither, his body and mind out of control. The drunkard is a deranged and inept sower of seed who in all likelihood would produce irregular and faithless offspring, crooked in character and in body. That's why a person, all year round, throughout his entire life, should be careful and refrain from any intentional exposure to disease, or actions that involve violence or injustice, especially at the time when children are begotten, for he must, necessarily, transfer and imprint these onto the souls and bodies of the offspring and produce utterly <sup>775E</sup> inferior children. Most importantly, he should refrain from such activities on that particular day and night, since a beginning, once established, is a goddess among humans, and the saviour of all, provided she is accorded the appropriate honour by those concerned.

The bridegroom should regard one of the two homes in the allotment <sup>776A</sup> as a sort of nest and nursery for his chicks, leave his father and mother, and make there his marriage, a dwelling place, and a source of sustenance for himself and his children. For when some element of longing is



present in relationships, it binds the various characters together and unites them, while unmoderated and uninterrupted companionship causes the longing to ebb away with the passage of time, because of the over familiarity. That's why the married couple should leave their own homes to the mother, father and the bride's relatives and live like newly arrived colonists, <sup>776B</sup> visiting and being visited, begetting and rearing their children, passing on the torch of life from one generation to another, always serving the gods in accordance with the laws.

Next comes the question of possessions: what sort of possessions would constitute well-proportioned wealth for the person who acquires them? Most of these are easy to rationalise and easy to acquire, but the case of household slaves presents all sorts <sup>776C</sup> of difficulties. The reason is that what we say about them is somehow incorrect but, in a sense, correct. For the various pronouncements we make about slaves contradict experience, and then again, accord with experience.

**Megillus:** What do you mean by this? We don't yet understand the point you are making, stranger.

**Ath:** That's only to be expected, Megillus. For the helot system of Sparta is well nigh the most puzzling and contentious issue in the Greek world, with some maintaining that it is good, others that it is not. This is more controversial than the system of slavery <sup>776D</sup> by which the people of Heraclea totally enslaved the Mariandyni, or the situation of the serfs in Thessaly. So in the light of these examples and others like them, what should we do about ownership of slaves? Now I made a point during the course of the argument and you, quite reasonably, asked me what I meant. The point is as follows: we know, I presume, that everyone would accept the need to acquire slaves who are as friendly and as good as possible. In fact, for some people, slaves have already proven superior to brothers or sons in terms of overall excellence, and have saved their own masters, his possessions <sup>776E</sup> and his household. We are aware, aren't we, that people say this sort of thing about slaves?

**Meg:** Of course.

**Ath:** Haven't we heard the opposite claim too; that the soul of the slave has no health in it, and that no man of sense should ever trust them at all? And the wisest of our poets explicitly proclaimed, speaking of Zeus

<sup>777A</sup> "For Zeus of the wide brows takes away one half of the virtue  
from a man, once the day of slavery closes upon him"<sup>1</sup>

Everyone makes his own decision on this issue. Some, as though they were dealing with wild animals, do not trust the serving class at all, and with goads and whips they make the servants' souls slavish, three times, nay, many times over, while others do the exact opposite.

**Meg:** Indeed.

**Cle:** <sup>777B</sup> Well stranger, in the face of such disagreement, what's to be done about this new territory of ours in relation to the ownership and punishment of slaves?

**Ath:** What indeed, Cleinias? It is evident that since the human being is a difficult creature, and when it comes to the inevitable distinction, whereby we differentiate, in practice, between slave, free man and master, humans seem to have no interest in co-operating in the process, so this form

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<sup>1</sup> Ody: xvii, 322 ff, (trans.Lattimore)

of property presents a difficulty. <sup>777C</sup> The extent of its evils are often demonstrated, in practice, by the frequent and familiar revolts of the enslaved Messenians, and by cities that own lots of slaves who speak the same language, and again by the various criminal exploits of the so-called pirates, that occur in Italy. Anyone looking at all this is bound to be at a loss as to what to do about such matters, in general. Only two devices are available to us: if the slaves are to be <sup>777D</sup> submissive they should not be fellow countrymen, or speak the same language, insofar as this is practicable, and they should be properly cared for, not only for their sake but more so for our own. The proper way to care for such people is to use no violence towards our servants and, as best we can, to do less wrong to them than we do to our equals. For someone who naturally and genuinely reveres justice and really hates injustice, displays his true stature when dealing with people whom he can easily mistreat. The person who remains untainted by irreverence <sup>777E</sup> and injustice in his conduct and behaviour towards slaves, would be well able to sow the seed for a harvest of excellence, and the same may rightly be said of a master, a tyrant, or anyone in a position of power, when dealing with someone weaker than themselves. Still, slaves should be punished when they deserve it, rather than spoiling them by using a mere reprimand, as if they were free men. Any address to a servant should be more like a direct instruction, <sup>778A</sup> and there should be no light-heartedness whatsoever with servants, male or female, whereby so many masters are tempted, most unwisely, to spoil their slaves, making life difficult for the slaves as subjects, and for themselves as rulers.

**Cle:** That's right.

**Ath:** Well, now that we have done our best to furnish the citizen with enough servants, suited to the various tasks he needs help with, we should, as a next step, draw up a plan for our houses.

**Cle:** Yes, certainly.

**Ath:** <sup>778B</sup> Since our city is new and has no pre-existing buildings, it seems it will, somehow, have to attend to every aspect of its architecture, in detail, in each case, including its temples and city walls. These considerations, strictly speaking, precede the matter of marriages, but for now, since our city exists in words only, it is quite legitimate to proceed in this way at the moment. Later, when our city is actually in existence, we shall, at that stage, God willing, make the architectural arrangements precede the marital arrangements which shall be the final step in the overall process. <sup>778C</sup> For the moment though, let's just give a brief outline.

**Cle:** Yes, very well.

**Ath:** So the temples should be built all around the market place and all over the city, in a circle, on the highest places, for the sake of security and cleanliness. Alongside these there should be buildings for various officials, and law-courts in which judgements shall be delivered and received, as though on holy ground, partly because the issues are sacred, <sup>778D</sup> and partly because the temples are consecrated to such revered gods. And among these would be law-courts in which trials for murder and for crimes that carry the death penalty may properly be held. As far as the walls are concerned, I would agree with the Spartan position on this, and allow the walls to lie dormant in the ground and not be erected, for the following reasons. An oft quoted verse from a poem puts this nicely when it says that our walls should be made of brass and iron, rather <sup>778E</sup> than stone. More to the point, we ourselves would rightly deserve to be laughed at, heartily, for sending our young folk out into the countryside every year to dig trenches and ditches and even to construct some buildings, to impede the enemy, all to prevent them from invading our country's borders, when our city is surrounded by a wall. A wall, in the first place, is not good for the health of our

cities and tends to make the inhabitants somewhat soft of soul, encouraging them to take refuge inside their wall <sup>779A</sup> rather than repulsing the enemy. Nor do they ensure their own safety by having some citizens on continuous guard duty, day and night. They imagine that they may sleep soundly, fenced in by security systems based upon walls and gates, as though they were born to a life of idleness, ignoring the fact that a life of ease is a reward for hard work, whereas, as I see it, base indolence and laziness tend to produce more troubles. But if it does prove necessary for people <sup>779B</sup> to have a wall, for some reason, then the construction of the private dwellings should be organised with this in mind from the outset, so that the entire city constitutes a single wall, every building being rendered secure by the uniformity and regularity of its orientation toward the streets. And it will be a pleasant sight, indeed, to see the city arranged like a single house, easy to guard and vastly superior to any other arrangement in terms of security. The maintenance of the original buildings would, primarily, be the responsibility of the inhabitants, but the city wardens <sup>779C</sup> would supervise them, and even use compulsion by fining anyone who was negligent, and they would also look after all aspects of city sanitation, and ensure that no private citizen encroaches upon public property with buildings or excavations. They must also look after rain water drainage, and any other matters, within the city or without, that would be appropriate for them to manage. On all these matters the guardians of the laws <sup>779D</sup> should legislate, as soon as they see the need, and on anything else that was omitted from the law code because it was unforeseen. And now that these, and the buildings of the market place, the gymnasia, and all the schools are ready for use, and the theatres are ready for the spectators, let's move on to the issues that come next, after marriage, as we follow the proper sequence of legislation.

**Cle:** By all means.

**Ath:** Well, Cleinias, let's assume that the wedding ceremony is over. There follows <sup>779E</sup> a period of at least a year before any children are born. The lifestyle of a bride and bridegroom, in a city that is to excel over most others, is not the easiest of topics to deal with but it follows naturally from our earlier discussions. We have faced a few challenges of this sort previously but this proposal will be harder for most people to accept than any of those others. Nevertheless, Cleinias, whatever we believe to be right and true must be spoken, without reservation.

**Cle:** Yes indeed.

**Ath:** <sup>780A</sup> Suppose someone proposes to promulgate laws for our cities, dealing with the public, communal lives of the citizens, while believing that compulsion in private matters is unnecessary, that everyone should be allowed to spend their day just as they please, and that there is no need to regulate everything by law. Well, he is much mistaken in this belief that, although he leaves private matters unregulated, the citizens will still be prepared to live their public and communal lives in accordance with his laws. Why am I saying all this? We shall maintain that our bridegrooms should frequent the communal meals just as much <sup>780B</sup> as they did before they were married. This custom was met with surprise when it was first introduced in your countries, probably dictated by a war, or pressure from some other circumstances, among a small population facing extreme difficulties. But once you had been forced to avail of communal meals, and had experienced their benefits, you formed the view that this custom was highly <sup>780C</sup> advantageous for the security of the city. And that is, more or less, how the practice of communal meals was established among yourselves.

**Cle:** Quite likely.

**Ath:** So, I am saying, that although this was once seen as a surprising custom, and somewhat daunting to impose on people, no such difficulty would face any lawgiver who wished to legislate for this nowadays. But there is a logical sequel to this, a measure that would also turn out well if it were implemented. But it is not implemented anywhere these days, and this failure effectively makes the lawgiver, as the saying goes, “card his wool into the fire”, and perform countless other never-ending tasks of that sort. This measure is not easy <sup>780D</sup> to mention, or to implement once it has been mentioned.

**Cle:** What is it, stranger, that you are trying to explain, and seem so reluctant to mention?

**Ath:** Listen then, so that we don’t spend a lot of time on this issue, in vain. In a city, whatever occurs in an orderly and lawful manner produces nothing but good, while anything unregulated or ill-regulated, for the most part undoes the work of something else that is well regulated. The issue we are discussing is a case in point. Among yourselves, Cleinias and Megillus, communal meals for men <sup>780E</sup> have been well established, to some surprise, as I said, born of some divine necessity, but there are no corresponding regulations in place for women, and this is simply not <sup>781A</sup> right. The practice of common meals for women has never seen the light of day, and so the female sex who are in general, more susceptible to secrecy and guile, have been abandoned to their own faults, by improper indulgence on the part of the lawgiver. Because you neglected women, you lost control of many things that would have gone much better than they do today, if only they had come under your laws. For neglecting the good order of women’s lives is not just half of the problem, as it might seem. <sup>781B</sup> To whatever extent the female nature is inferior in terms of excellence to the male nature, to that extent the effect of its negative influence would be more than double.<sup>2</sup> So it would be better for the overall happiness of the city to revise this custom and put things right by arranging all the activities of men and women jointly. But nowadays the human race is so far removed from this fortunate situation that it is impossible for a man of sense <sup>781C</sup> even to mention this, in other regions or cities where the very existence of communal dining as a civic institution is totally unfamiliar. How then will anyone, without becoming a laughing stock, set about forcing women to consume their food and drink in full public view? The female sex would be more reluctant to put up with this than with anything else, accustomed as they are to living in seclusion and obscurity. They will offer all sorts of resistance to being led, forcibly, into the light of day, and will be more than a match for any lawgiver. <sup>781D</sup> In other cities, as I was saying, women would not tolerate even the mention of the correct principle without a massive outcry, but in our city they might be tolerant. So if you want this account dealing with civic affairs in general to achieve its objective, in theory at least, then I am prepared to argue that this proposal is good and appropriate, if you both agree to listen, otherwise let’s drop the subject.

**Cle:** No, stranger, we are both extremely enthusiastic about hearing you speak.

**Ath:** Listen to this then, but don’t be surprised if I seem to be starting from <sup>781E</sup> a long way back. For we are enjoying our time together and we are under no pressure to stop our comprehensive examination of every aspect of the laws.

**Cle:** Quite right.

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<sup>2</sup> The half and the double do not apply to the same quantity: the former is half the mischief which would be effected by the whole race, if unregulated; the latter the double of the harm which either half (the male or the female) would do if they had been equally bad. England, footnote, p.631.

**Ath:** Well, let's revert once more to our initial statements.<sup>3</sup> Everyone would do well to bear in mind this much at least: either the human race never had any beginning whatsoever and will never have any end at all, but always was and always will be, or else an absolutely vast period of time must have elapsed since the race first began.

**Cle:** Indeed.

**Ath:** Well now, can't we also assume that, all over the world, cities have been founded and have perished, that there have been regimes of all sorts, some orderly, some disorderly, and a huge variety of tastes and fashions in eating and drinking, and all sorts of revolutions of climate too, during which the living organisms probably underwent innumerable <sup>782B</sup> transformations.

**Cle:** of course.

**Ath:** Yes, and we also believe, I presume, that vines made their appearance at some stage although they didn't exist before then, and the same goes for olives and the various gifts of Demeter and the Virgin, and that some Triptolemus was the agent of all this. And we must presume, mustn't we, that at the time when these fruits of the earth didn't exist, the living organisms took to feeding on one another, just as they do nowadays?

**Cle:** Indeed.

**Ath:** <sup>782C</sup> And even today, in many regions, we see that human sacrifice still persists. And we are also told that in other regions, by contrast, people dared not taste the flesh of oxen, and there were no animal sacrifices, but "pure" sacrifices of cakes and meal, soaked in honey and the like. They refrained from the flesh of animals, as it was an unholy act to eat it, or to pollute the altars of the gods with blood. In those days a so called Orphic lifestyle was prevalent among us, which held to a strictly vegetarian diet, and they refrained completely <sup>782D</sup> from eating living creatures.

**Cle:** Yes, this is referred to a lot and the reports are quite credible.

**Ath:** Now someone might ask us why we are now saying all this.

**Cle:** You're right about that, stranger.

**Ath:** So, as best I can, I'll try to set out the considerations that follow from these.

**Cle:** Please proceed.

**Ath:** I observe that, for human beings, everything depends upon three necessary desires, which result in excellence if people are led aright, and its <sup>782E</sup> opposite if they are led badly. As soon as they are born there are the desires for food and drink. Every creature has an innate passion for all this as it is full of frenzied defiance at the suggestion that anyone should do anything else except gratify their pleasures and desires for everything of this sort, and be quit of all pain. Our third <sup>783A</sup> and greatest need, and our most extreme passion, which emerges later and completely inflames us humans to madness, is the burning wanton passion for procreation. These three disorders, then, must be diverted towards what is best rather than what is said to be most pleasant. We must try to restrain them by the three mighty forces of fear, law and true reason, assisted by the Muses and the gods of competitions to stem <sup>783B</sup> their growth and influence.

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<sup>3</sup> This refers back to the start of Book III, see England, p.633.

So after the subject of marriage let's place the procreation of children, followed by their nurture and education. And perhaps if our discussions proceed in this way, each of our laws will reach a conclusion. And when we come to the communal meals, and view the issues at close quarters, perhaps we may see more clearly whether this sort of communal activity should include women or be confined only to men. And having arranged the preliminaries to the communal meals, which are still unregulated <sup>783C</sup> at present, we shall place these in front of them and, as I said just now, we shall look at the communal meals with greater precision, and be better able to prescribe suitable and appropriate laws for them.

**Cle:** Absolutely correct.

**Ath:** Well let's preserve the memory of what has been said just now, since all of this may prove useful at some stage.

**Cle:** What are you telling us to remember?

**Ath:** The three factors we defined. I think we spoke first of eating, secondly of drinking and thirdly of violent sexual <sup>783D</sup> excitement.

**Cle:** Yes, stranger, we shall certainly remember what you are telling us to remember.

**Ath:** Good. Let's turn our attention to the married couple then, and teach them how, and in what way they should procreate children, employing legal threats if we fail to persuade them.

**Cle:** In what way?

**Ath:** The bride and bridegroom should have the intention, as best they can, of presenting <sup>783E</sup> the city with the very finest and the very best progeny. Now whenever any human beings who are partners in any activity apply their intelligence to themselves and to the activity, the outcome is entirely noble and good, but the outcome is the direct opposite if they do not pay attention or are devoid of intelligence. So the bridegroom should apply his intelligence to the bride and to procreation and the bride should do the same. They should have overseers, women whom we have appointed, their number, more or less, and the timing of their appointment, being determined by the officials, as they see fit. They are to gather every day at the temple of Eileithyia for at least one third of an hour. At the gathering they should inform one another of any man or woman of reproductive age, whom they see preoccupied with anything else besides the injunctions imposed upon them as a consequence of the sacrifices and solemnities of their marriage. <sup>784B</sup> Let this period of producing children, and oversight of the young couples, last no more than ten years in cases where offspring are plentiful. But if some couples are still childless after this period of time, they should separate, having taken advice, jointly, as to what is advantageous for both of them, from family members and the female officials. And if some dispute arises over what is appropriate and advantageous for each party they should choose ten guardians of the laws, <sup>784C</sup> accept their remit as arbiters, and abide by the instructions they issue. The female supervisors are to put a stop to any errors and folly of the couples by going into their homes and using admonitions or threats. If they are unsuccessful, they should go to the guardians of the laws and report the problem, and the guardians should deal with it. If even the guardians are somehow successful they should bring the matter to public attention by publishing a notice, having sworn on oath that they are unable to reform such and such <sup>784D</sup> a person. Unless the person who is the subject of the notice turns the tables on his accusers in a court of law, he is to be deprived of his rights, as follows: he may not attend weddings or thanksgivings for the birth of children, and if he shows up, anyone who wishes

may, with impunity, punish him with blows. The same regulations shall also apply to a woman. If she has been reported publicly, <sup>784E</sup> in like manner, for disorderly behaviour, and loses her case, she shall be excluded from the processions of women or from any honours, and from attending weddings or celebrations of the births of children.

Once they have produced their children as ordained by the laws, a man who consorts with another woman or a woman who consorts with another man, while the other party is still of reproductive age, shall incur the same penalties as outlined for those who are still producing children. Once this time has passed, a man or a woman who shows restraint in such matters should be well regarded in every way, while those who do the opposite should be honoured in the opposite way or, rather, shown no respect at all. When most people are moderate in their behaviour in such matters <sup>785A</sup> the regulations can be left lie, in silence, but if disorder sets in among the general population, then regulations should be implemented based upon the laws we have just prescribed.

For each person, their first year is the start of their entire life, and this should be recorded in their ancestral shrines as the “beginning of life”, for each boy and girl. A further record should be kept, on a whitened wall in each tribe, giving the number associated with particular archons after whom the years are numbered. Nearby the names of those members of the tribe who are still alive <sup>785B</sup> should be written, while the names of the deceased should be erased. For marriage, the age limits shall be sixteen to twenty for a girl, the longest determinate time, and thirty to thirty-five for a boy. For public office, the age limit shall be forty for a woman, thirty for a man. For military service, the age limits shall be twenty to sixty for a man. A woman, once she has borne her children, may be directed to do what she is able to do and what’s appropriate in each case, until she turns fifty, doing whatever military duties are deemed useful.

## End Book 6