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Plato (c. 428-348 BCE)

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Soc.

It was told us recently by someone about Cleitophon, the son of Aristonymus, that in a conversation he had with Lysias he was finding fault with the instructions of Socrates and praising to the skies the lectures of Thrasymachus.

Cleit.

That was a man, Socrates, who gave you a false report of the talk I had about you with Lysias. For I was really praising you for some things, though not for others. But since it is plain that you are reproaching me, though you pretend to be quite indifferent, I should be delighted to repeat to you myself what I said, now that we happen to be alone, so that you may be less inclined to suspect me of holding a poor opinion of you. For at present it seems that you have heard what is not true, with the result that you appear to be more vexed with me than I deserve. So if you give me leave to speak I shall avail myself of it most gladly, as I want to explain.

Soc.

Well, now, it would be indeed unhandsome of me not to put up with it when you are so anxious to do me a benefit. For obviously, when I have been taught my good points and my bad, I shall practice and pursue the one and eschew the other with all my might.

Cleit.

Listen, then. When I was attending your lectures, Socrates, I was oftentimes amazed at what I heard, and you seemed to me to surpass all other men in the nobleness of your discourse, when you rebuked mankind and chanted these words like a God on the tragic stage:

"Whither haste ye, O men? Yea, verily ye know not that ye are doing none of the things ye ought, seeing that ye spend your whole energy on wealth and the acquiring of it; while as to your sons to whom ye will bequeath it, ye neglect to ensure that they shall understand how to use it justly, and ye find for them no teachers of justice, if so be that it is teachable [1]—or if it be a matter of training and practice, instructors who can efficiently practice and train them—nor have ye even begun by reforming yourselves in this respect. Yet when ye perceive that ye yourselves and your children, though adequately instructed in letters and music and gymnastic— which ye, forsooth, regard as a complete education in virtue—are in consequence none the less vicious in respect of wealth, how is it that ye do not contemn this present mode of education nor search for teachers who will put an end to this your lack of culture? Yet truly it is because of this dissonance and sloth, and not because of failure to keep in step with the lyre that brother with brother and city with city clash together without measure or harmony and are at strife, and in their warring perpetrate and suffer the uttermost horrors. But ye assert that the unjust are unjust not because of their lack of education and lack of knowledge but voluntarily, while on the other hand ye have the face to affirm that injustice is a foul thing, and hateful to Heaven. Then how, pray, could any man voluntarily choose an evil of such a kind? Any man, you reply, who is mastered by his pleasures. But is not this condition also involuntary, if the act of mastering be voluntary? Thus in every way the argument proves that unjust action is involuntary, and that every man privately and all the cities publicly ought to pay more attention than they do now to this matter." So then, Socrates, when I hear you constantly making these speeches I admire you immensely and praise you to the skies. So too when you state the next point in your argument, that those who train their bodies but neglect their souls are guilty of another action of the same sort—neglecting the part that should rule, and attending to that which should be ruled. Also when you declare that whatsoever object a man knows not how to make use of, it is better for him to refrain from making use thereof; thus, suppose a man knows not how to use his eyes or his ears or the whole of his body, it is better for such a man not to hear nor to see nor to employ his body for any other use rather than to use it in any way whatsoever.

Cleit.

[1] Cf. *Plat. Meno 70a*, *Plat. Euthyd. 282b* ff.

So too, likewise, with respect to art: it is surely plain that a man who does not know how to use his own lyre does not know either how to use his neighbor's, and that one who does not know how to use the lyre of others does not know how to use his own either,—nor yet any other instrument or chattel. Moreover, the conclusion of this argument of yours is a fine one,—how that for every man who knows not how to make use of his soul it is better to have his soul at rest and not to live, than to live acting according to his own caprice; but if it is necessary for him to live, it is better after all for such an one to spend his life as a slave rather than a free man, handing over the rudder of his will, as it were of a ship, to another man who has learnt the art of steering men—which is the name that you, Socrates, frequently give to politics, when you declare that this very same art is that of judging and justice. Against these arguments and others of a like kind, exceedingly numerous and couched in exceedingly noble language, showing that virtue can be taught and that a man should care above all else for himself, I have hardly uttered a word up till now, nor do I suppose that I ever shall utter a word against them in the future, for I regard them as most valuable admonitions and most useful, literally capable of waking us up, as it were, out of our slumber. So I gave my attention with a view to hear what was to follow next, although I did not at first question you yourself, Socrates, but some of your contemporaries and fellow-students or companions—or whatever name one ought to give to the relation in which they stand towards you. Of these I questioned first those who are specially held in regard by yourself, asking them what was your next argument, and propounding the matter to them somewhat after your own fashion:

"I ask you, my very good Sirs, in what sense do we now accept the exhortation to virtue which Socrates has given us. Are we to regard it as all there is, and suppose it to be impossible to pursue the object further and grasp it fully; and is this to be our lifelong task, just to exhort those who have not as yet been exhorted, and that they in turn should exhort others? Or, when we have agreed that this is exactly what a man should do, ought we to ask Socrates, and one another, the further question—"What is the next step?" What do we say is the way in which we ought to begin the study of justice? Just as if a man were exhorting us to devote care to our bodies, observing that we like children had as yet no notion of the existence of the arts of gymnastics and medicine; and were then to reproach us and say that it is disgraceful to spend all one's care on wheat and barley and vines and all the goods which we labor to acquire for the sake of the body, and

yet make no effort to discover some art or device for securing that the body itself shall be in the best possible condition—and that in spite of the fact that such an art exists."

Cleit.

"Suppose then that we had put to the man who was thus exhorting us this further question— "What arts do you say these are?" His answer, no doubt, would be—"Gymnastics and medicine." So now, in the case before us, what do we say is the art which deals with the virtue of the soul? Let it be stated." Then he who was reputed to be their most powerful exponent of these matters answered me and said that this art is precisely that which, said he, you hear Socrates describing,—nothing else than justice. I then replied—

"Do not explain to me merely its name, but like this:—There is an art called medicine; and of this the effects are two-fold, the one being to produce constantly new doctors in addition to those already existing, and the other to produce health. And of these the latter result is no longer in itself an art but an effect of that art which both teaches and is taught, which effect we term "health." So likewise the operations of the joiner's art are a house and joinery, of which the one is an effect, the other a doctrine. In like manner let it be granted that the one effect of justice is to produce just men, as of the other arts their several artists; but as to the other, the operation which the just man is capable of performing for us, what do we say that is? Tell us." The reply of your exponent was, I think,

"The beneficial"; while another said

"The right"; a third

"The useful"; and yet another

"The profitable." So I resumed my inquiry and said:

"In the former case also we find these names in each one of the arts—doing "the right," "the profitable," "the useful," and the rest of such terms; but as regards the object at which all these operations aim, each art will declare that which is peculiar to itself; for example, the art of joinery will assert that the result of good, beautiful, and right action is the production of wooden vessels, which in themselves are not an art. So let the operation of justice be stated in the same way." Finally, Socrates, one of your companions, who was reputed to be a most accomplished speaker, made answer that the peculiar effect of justice, which was effected by no other art, was to produce friendship in States. [2] And he, in turn, when questioned declared that friendship is a

[2]Cf. *Plat. Rep. 351d.*

good thing and never an evil; while as to the friendships of children and those of wild beasts, which we call by this name, he refused to admit—when questioned upon the point—that they were friendships; since, as a result of the argument, he was forced to say that such relations were for the most part harmful rather than good. So to avoid such an admission he denied that such relations were friendships at all, and said that those who give them this name name them falsely; and real and true friendship, he said, is most exactly described as "unanimity." And when asked about "unanimity," whether he declared it to be unity of opinion [3] or "knowledge," he rejected the expression "unity of opinion," for of necessity many cases of "unity of opinion" occurred amongst men that were harmful, whereas he had agreed that friendship was wholly a good thing and an effect of justice; consequently he affirmed that unanimity was the same, and was not opinion, but knowledge.

Cleit.

Now when we were at this point in the argument and at our wits' end, the bystanders were ready to fall upon the man and to cry that the argument had circled round to the same point as at first; and they declared that:

"Medicine also is a kind of "unanimity," as are all the arts, and they are able to explain what it is they deal with; but as for the "justice" or "unanimity" which you talk of, it has no comprehension of what its own aim is, and what the effect of it is remains quite obscure." Finally, Socrates, I put these questions to you yourself also, and you told me that it belonged to justice to injure one's enemies and to do well to one's friends. But later on it appeared that the just man never injures anyone, for in all his acts he aims at benefiting all. So after repeated questionings—not once only or twice but spending quite a long time at it—I gave it up, concluding that though you were better than any man at the task of exhorting men to devote themselves to virtue, yet of these two alternatives one must be true: either you are capable of effecting thus much only and nothing more,—a thing which might happen also in respect of any other art whatsoever, as for example a man who was no steersman might practice composing an eulogy of that art as one of high value to mankind, and so too with all the other arts; so against you too one might perhaps bring the same charge in regard to justice, that you are none the more an expert about justice because you eulogize it finely. Not that this is the complaint I make myself; but it must be one or other of these two alternatives,—either you do not possess

[3] Cf. *Plat. Rep. 433c.*

the knowledge or else you refuse to let me share it. Consequently, methinks I will betake myself, in my perplexity, to Thrasymachus and to everyone else I can. However, if you are really willing to refrain at last from addressing to me these hortatory discourses, and just as you would have followed up the hortatory discourse, suppose you had been exhorting me in respect of gymnastics that I should not neglect my body, by explaining the nature of the body and the nature of the treatment it requires—so let the same course be followed in the present case. Assume that Cleitophon agrees that it is ridiculous to expend care on everything else and to neglect the soul, for the sake of which all the other labour is incurred; and suppose also that I have made all the other subsequent statements which I rehearsed just now. And I entreat you, as I speak, by no means to act otherwise, lest I should do, as I do now, praise you in part to Lysias and to the others, and also in part blame you. For I shall maintain, Socrates, that while you are of untold value to a man who has not been exhorted, to him who has been exhorted you are almost an actual hindrance in the way of his attaining the goal of virtue and becoming a happy man.

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