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THE DOCTRINE OF THRASYMACHUS IN PLATO'S "REPUBLIC"

"A sophist of the fifth century whom scholars of modern times almost without exception have treated carelessly and with less than justice." These words were written of Thrasymachus over fifty years ago,[1] and are no less true at the present day. It is the purpose of this article to attempt to re-examine the account of Thrasymachus' doctrine in Plato's *Republic*, and to show how it can form a self-consistent whole. When he first enters the discussion (338c1-2), Thrasymachus says that Justice is the interest of the stronger or superior. When asked for further elucidation he declares that in each city it is the ruling body which is the stronger or superior, and whether this be a tyrant, a democracy or an aristocracy, in each case it makes the laws in its own interest, so that in all cities one and the same thing is just, the interest of the ruling body (338d5-339a3).

This leaves the precise nature of Thrasymachus' view of Justice far from clear. One or more of the following positions have been attributed to him:

I. Moral obligation has no real existence, but is an illusion in men's minds (Ethical Nihilism).

II. Moral obligation has no existence apart from legal enactment (Legalism).

III. Moral obligation has real independent existence, and arises from the nature of man (Natural Right).

IV. Men always do in fact pursue what they think to be their own interests and must from their nature do so (Psychological egoism).

Position I is ascribed to Thrasymachus by Burnet,[2] Taylor,[3] Cornford,[4] Barker,[5] Nettleship,[6] Joseph,[7] among British scholars. Position II has sometimes been attributed to Thrasymachus if not very frequently. It may have been the view of Grote,[8] it is hinted at by Gomperz,[9] Lindsay[10] and Bosanquet,[11] and is explicitly stated by one recent writer, A. D. Winspear.[12] It is, of course, quite distinct from

[1] By E. Schwarz, *De Thrasymacho Chalcedonio*, Rostock 1892, p. 3 (in Latin).

[2] "the doctrine of Kallikles is not a complete ethical nihilism. Might really is Right. That is a very different thing from saying Right is Might. In the *Republic* that is the doctrine maintained by Thrasymachos. According to him there is no Right at all, and what we call by that name is only 'the interest of the stronger' which he is able to force the weaker to accept as lawful and binding on themselves in virtue of his strength."—Burnet, *Greek Philosophy Thales to Plato*, p. 121.

[3] "As Thrasymachus states the case, there is really no such thing as moral obligation. What men call 'right' is 'the interest of the superior.'"—Taylor, *Plato, the man and his work*, p. 268.

[4] "He (Thrasymachus) holds that justice or right is nothing but the name given by the men actually holding power in any state to any actions they enjoin by law upon their subjects; and that all their laws are framed to promote their own personal or class interests. 'Just' accordingly means what is for the interest of the stronger, ruling party. Right and wrong have no other meaning at all."—Cornford, *The Republic of Plato translated*, p. 14.

[5] "In the view of Thrasymachus there is no such thing at all as natural Right. Right is simply whatever is enforced by the strongest power in the State in accordance with its view of its own interests."—Barker, *Greek Political Theory: Plato and his predecessors*, p. 72.

[6] "Thrasymachus does away with any distinction of right and wrong; the only principle he recognises is that of self-interest; if self-interest is successful it gets called justice, that is all."—Nettleship, *Lectures on the Republic of Plato*, p. 32.

[7] "Thrasymachus admits no moral obligation, though he finds it difficult at places to divest his mind of sentiments based on its admission. When he says that to obey the law is just, or that it is just to do what is the interest of the stronger he does not think himself to be informing persons who know what they mean by 'just' what actions have that character. 'Just' is no more than a name given to actions that are in the interest of the stronger or that conform to law, by which they are designated without implication of any further character than that of advantaging the stronger or conforming to law."—Joseph, *Essays in ancient and modern philosophy*, p. 19.

[8] "Thrasymachus does not travel out of society to insist upon anterior rights dating from a supposed state of nature—he takes societies as he finds them, recognising the actual governing authority of each as a canon and constituent of justice or injustice."—Grote, *History of Greece*, Ch. lxvii (Vol. VIII, p. 195, edn. of 1883).

[9] *Greek Thinkers*, Eng. Trans. Vol. III, pp. 56-7.

[10] Intro. to *Translation of Republic*, p. xii: "After a little examination he is discovered to mean that right and wrong are made by law."

[11] "Justice is wholly social, or rather political."—Bosanquet, *A Companion to Plato's Republic*, p. 49.

[12] "Thrasymachus' argument is, of course, the reflection in ethics and politics of the old doctrine of Heraclitus that justice is to be found in the process of material and social change and not something which stands above and apart from the process."—A. D. Winspear, *The Genesis of Plato's Thought*, New York, 1940, p. 145, cf. 190-2.

Position I—the Nihilist view asserts that there is no such thing as moral obligation either inside or outside societies. Position II—the Legalist view—does not deny the existence of moral obligation, but asserts that it comes into existence only with the formation of societies, and that its content will vary with the structure of the society in question (cf 338e1-339a4).

Position III was the older view attributed to Thrasymachus by Stallbaum and is frequent in continental writers.[13] A mark of this view is that the position of Thrasymachus is practically identical with that of Callicles in the *Gorgias*, whereas the Nihilist view (Position I) distinguishes sharply between the two positions.[14] Position IV is obviously of a different character from the preceding three—it is a psychological statement and has nothing to say about moral obligation. Moreover it is compatible with each of the three preceding positions. It is attributed to Thrasymachus by Joseph[15] together with Position I.

The only way we have of determining which of these positions was actually assigned to Thrasymachus by Plato, is by a somewhat rigorous examination of the course of the argument between Socrates and Thrasymachus in Book I of the Republic. It is possible of course that Thrasymachus will be found to change his position in the course of the argument, but this conclusion must be excluded until an attempt has first been made to trace a single consistent position held by Thrasymachus throughout. In this paper it is maintained that Thrasymachus is holding a form of Position III, and that he does so with consistency throughout the various encounters with Socrates. His position has been obscured because he does not state all he thinks right at the beginning of the discussion, but there is nothing inconsistent between his various statements in the course of the book.

Thrasymachus' first statement of his position extends from 338c1 to 339b9. It rests upon two propositions: (1) Justice is the interest of the stronger or superior. (2) In each city the ruling body makes the laws in its own interest and it is just for subjects to obey the laws so made and unjust for them to disobey. To this Socrates objects that rulers are liable to make mistakes as to their own interests, and if these mistakes are expressed in laws which it is just for the subjects to obey, it will sometimes be just for them to seek the opposite of the interest of the rulers (339c1-340b5). In effect he is calling upon Thrasymachus further to define his position and is pointing out that Thrasymachus is offering two accounts of justice. You can either define justice as "the interest of the stronger" *or* as "the *laws* which the stronger make," but not as both since there will be occasions when the two do not coincide.

Clitophon, a supporter of Thrasymachus, rushes into the argument and suggests that Thrasymachus meant to say "the interest of the stronger which is thought to be so by the stronger, whether it is so or not" (340a2-c5). But Thrasymachus refuses to accept the suggestion of Clitophon, and introduces instead the conception of the ruler in the strict sense who does not make mistakes. The significance of Clitophon's suggestion and its rejection by Thrasymachus does not seem to have been properly understood. According to Jowett,[16] the suggestion of Clitophon is "an unmeaning evasion, for though his real and apparent interests may differ, what the ruler thinks to be his interest will always be what he thinks to be his interest." On the contrary, says Joseph,[17] "it is in fact precisely what Thrasymachus should have said." What is the truth in this matter? First of all the suggestion of Clitophon is certainly not an unmeaning evasion—it is in fact *one* way of answering

[13] Cf. Wilamowitz, *Platon*, I[3] 209, "Er vertritt . . . eine moralisch-politische Theorie, das Recht der Stärkeren, für Sokrates das Prinzip der absoluten Ungerechtigkeit." Oppenheimer in *Pauly-Wissowa RE* VI A (1936) sv. Thrasymachos 585-6, G. Saitta *L'illuminismo della sofistica greca*, 1938, 135 ff, Jaeger, *Paideia*, Vol. II, p. 203-4.

[14] Cf. above n. 2.

[15] "For he holds, like Hobbes, that every man acts only with a view to his own private interest—if he makes laws, as thinking them in his own interest; if he obeys them, as thinking it in his interest rather to obey than to pay the penalty of disobedience, though the act itself required of him brings benefit not to him but to the ruler."—Joseph, op. cit., 17.

[16] Intro. to trans. of Republic, p. xx.

[17] Op. cit., 17.

the objection which Socrates has just brought against Thrasymachus. Define justice as whatever the ruler thinks to be in his interest. Assume that the ruler always makes laws in accordance with what he thinks to be his interest. You will in effect[18] be saying justice consists in obeying the laws made by the ruler whatever their content. Or, more shortly still, justice consists in obeying the laws (Position II—Legalism). In other words Clitophon has understood the significance of the objection of Socrates with its implied demand that Thrasymachus should choose between Justice as the interest of the stronger and Justice as obedience to the laws. Clitophon says "Justice is obedience to the laws" while saving as much as he can of the doctrine that Justice is the interest of the stronger.

Now there can be no doubt that this is what Thrasymachus ought to have said if he held a legalist view of Justice (Position II)—he must at all costs keep to the actual laws, and the fact that he does not do so is the first piece of evidence that he did not hold the legalist view. But what if he held the Nihilist view (Position I)? Here also he should surely have followed the path suggested by Clitophon. He would then be maintaining that moral obligation
moral obligation arises from something which does actually exist, namely, the laws. These do not embody anything else but what the rulers think to be their interests. Any appeal to an ideal which is not actual, as to the ideal ruler who is infallible, is not only irrelevant, but weakens the whole basis of his theory. If one ideal is admitted, why not another, moral obligation? The fact that Thrasymachus refuses to follow this line may be taken as the first piece of evidence that he did not hold the Nihilist view (Position I) any more than he held Position II.

Finally the suggestion of Clitophon is not compatible with Position III—the theory of Natural Right. This would have been immediately clear if Thrasymachus had spoken of natural *Justice* (which he never does). If an independent ideal of justice is set up as distinct from legal or enacted justice, then this ideal justice cannot be defined in terms of obedience to the laws whatever the content of the laws. The same is true of *Injustice* which Thrasymachus is going on to set up as an ideal. If justice consists in obeying the laws whatever they command, injustice will consist in disobeying the laws whatever they command. But as Thrasymachus is going on to set up injustice as an ideal, distinct from legal injustice, he cannot base it simply on disobedience to the laws, and this is the position to which he would have been committed had he followed the suggestion of Clitophon. Accordingly I have no doubt that here is the real reason why he refuses to follow the path which Clitophon laid before him—he could not do so while maintaining the view which he really holds.

At all events Thrasymachus will have nothing to do with the suggestion which Clitophon makes. He freely admits that people who rule do actually make mistakes as to their interest (340e6). What he says is that the ruler *qua* ruler does not make mistakes as to his interest, and so in his legislation prescribes what is best for himself, just as we might say no craftsman *qua* craftsman makes mistakes in his art, but only in so far as he fails to be a craftsman. It is the interest of the ruler in the strict sense which it is just for the inferior to seek (340c6-341b10). Thrasymachus in this way chooses to define justice strictly as the interest of the stronger rather than the laws which the stronger make in cases where the two definitions do not coincide. He is of course as has been often pointed out[19] introducing a contrast between the ideal and the actual, but there is nothing in the way in which he does it which is inconsistent with anything which he has said previously. He is in fact saying that there is an *art* of ruling and Socrates proceeds to examine the concept of an art of ruling on the analogy of other arts (341c4-342e11).

[18] In effect only, because there is still the possibility that "what the ruler thinks to be his interest" and "what the laws command" may not be the same, e.g. through a mistake in the drafting of a law. But such an objection would hardly be of practical importance where laws were usually simple and short and there were no elaborate principles for the interpretation of statutes.

[19] Cf. e.g. Joseph, op. cit. 18, D. J. Allan, Intro. Rep. I, p. 27, Taylor, *Plato*, 269, Nettleship, op. cit., 29-30.

Socrates argues that to every Art there is a specific object, and it is the whole nature of an art to promote the interests of that object. So far (to 342c7) this is what Thrasymachus himself might have said and he assents without difficulty. Socrates then argues that the arts rule and are superior over their objects. Every art is concerned with promoting the interest of that which is ruled and governed by it, and so the art of ruling consists in promoting the interest of the ruled, not of the rulers. This of course begs the question completely. The real question between Socrates and Thrasymachus is " agreed that there is an art of ruling, what is its object?". Thrasymachus holds that its object is the promotion of the interest of the ruler, while Socrates is here maintaining that it is the promotion of the interest of the ruled. It is by a mere play on words that Socrates equates the object of the art of ruling with the ruled, as being that over which the art of ruling " rules ".

Thrasymachus had assented to the later propositions of Socrates with reluctance and he now states his objections at the beginning of a continuous speech. Socrates had attempted to draw his conclusion from the nature of an art in general. Thrasymachus replies (343a1-c1) that the correct analogy is the case of the shepherd and the flock. In the exercise of his art the shepherd may in a sense seek the good of the flock but it is only with the ultimate end of promoting his own interest (or that of his master). That is to say while every art does look towards the interest of its object, that object may not be the immediate physical object on which the art is exercised, but something beyond it. In the case of the art of ruling the immediate object is the ruled, but the ultimate object is the interest of the ruler. There is then nothing improper in supposing that there is an art concerned with a specific sphere, which has as its ultimate end the promotion of the interests of those who practise it. This was what Socrates' argument was concerned to deny, and Thrasymachus answers it completely not in abstract terms, but much more effectively, with a single convincing example.

In the discussion of the ruler *qua* ruler and the implications of the concept of an art of ruling down to this point there is nothing incompatible with either the Nihilist view (Position I), the Legalist view (Position II) or the doctrine of Natural Right (Position III). We have in fact for the moment moved away from discussions of justice and injustice as such. But Thrasymachus realises the need for a fresh statement of his position and there now follows the fullest account of his views on justice and injustice which we have (343c1-344c8). His statement has hardly received the attention which it merits, and it has often been dismissed as hardly worthy of serious study.[20]

Before approaching the study of the speech it is necessary to be quite clear as to what Thrasymachus has already said. He had begun by saying justice is the interest of the stronger. By this he means that it is just for the subject to seek the interest of the ruler and this is clearly stated (338e3-4 and 339b7-9). It seems to have been very commonly assumed that he means also that it is just for the *ruler* to seek his own interest.[21] But nowhere does Thrasymachus say, hint, or imply that this was his view.[22] The truth is that Thrasymachus gave his original statement about justice as a statement of what is just for the ruled and down to the present speech

[20] " This is a perfectly abstract argument (the argument about the art of ruling): the result of it is that Thrasymachus gives up the pretension to be scientific and logical which he has so far made."—Nettleship, op. cit., 32.

" The speech is too rhetorical, too rambling to make for success in the present debate."—Allan, Intro. p. 29.

" Here Thrasymachus gives up the argument and all serious attempts at defining justice."—A. D. Lindsay, *Republic Trans.*, Intro. xxxiii (ed. Dent 1929).

[21] " For Thrasymachus does away with any distinction of right and wrong; the only principle which he recognises is that of self-interest: if self-interest is successful it gets called justice, that is all."—Nettleship, op. cit., 32.

" But if justice thus consists in whatever is for the ruler's interest it follows that, *for everybody other than the ruler* (my Italics), justice may be further defined, according to the popular definition, as 'another's good.'" (i.e. for the ruler justice consists in pursuing his own good)—Barker, op. cit., 156.

" His original case was that, once the veil of hyprocisy has been removed, it would appear that justice is simply power: and the logical consequence of this is that a tyrant is not a very unjust man, but on the contrary a very just one."—Allan, op. cit., p. 29.

[22] It is true he thinks the ruler *ought* to pursue his own interest, but for Thrasymachus, as will appear later, men *ought* to be unjust, not just.

neither Thrasymachus nor Socrates apply the terms just or unjust or any of their equivalents to the ruler. It was Socrates' insistence on arguing from the point of view of the ruler that forced Thrasymachus to turn his attention to the ruler. When he does so, he speaks of the just ruler as the man who does *not* seek his own interest, i.e., the interest of the stronger, but he implies that he seeks the interest of the subjects (343e1-7 and 348c12). Likewise he again and again speaks of the ruler who pursues his own interest as *unjust*. I am convinced that it is this false attribution to Thrasymachus of the doctrine that it is just for the ruler to pursue his own interest which has led to so much confusion in the interpretation of what he says. If we start from this false view of what Thrasymachus meant, when we come to the present speech we have either to suppose that Thrasymachus has become muddled and confused with his own terminology, or to suppose that he is embarking on an elaborate reversal of terms and is using a double terminology—his own special terminology and the traditional terminology.[23]

The part of the speech with which we are concerned begins with the long sentence: "So profoundly wise are you concerning the just and justice, and the unjust and injustice, that you are unaware that justice and the just is really the good of another, the advantage of the stronger who rules, but the self-inflicted injury of the subject who obeys; that injustice is the opposite and rules those very simple just souls; that the governed serve the advantage of the stronger man, and by their obedience contribute to his happiness, but in no way to their own." (343c1-d1, trans. Lindsay). He then argues that injustice is profitable and in fact praised by men, when practised on a sufficiently large scale, and concludes: "Therefore, Socrates, injustice, when great enough, is mightier and freer and more masterly than justice; and, as I said at the start, justice is to the advantage of the stronger, but injustice is profitable and advantageous to oneself."

Those who suppose that Thrasymachus is reversing the usual meaning of ethical terms, seem to suppose that he implies four terms—Justice in the Thrasymachean sense = the advantage of the stronger, and Justice in the traditional sense = the disadvantage of the stronger (cf 343e1-7); Injustice in the Thrasymachean sense ought then to be the disadvantage of the stronger, but this sense is not used by Thrasymachus, and finally Injustice in the traditional sense as the advantage of the stronger. All four terms on this view would be applicable equally to actions by rulers and to actions by ruled. It will be seen that the scheme follows from (1) Taking the original statement, Justice is the interest of the stronger, as a complete definition, intended to cover actions by the ruler as well as by the ruled. (2) Attempting to make the statements in the present passage consistent with the

[23] "The real interest of the stronger is injustice; not injustice on the small scale of ordinary crime, but injustice on a grand scale. What is called justice and what is called injustice are in reality the same thing, only described from different points of view. *If the doer of unjust things is strong enough, then what he does is called justice by weaker men* (my Italics); if he is weak, then it is called injustice by stronger men and he is punished."—Nettleship, op. cit., p. 32.

"But if justice thus consists in whatever is for the ruler's interest, it follows that, *for everybody other than the ruler* (my Italics), justice may be further defined, according to a popular definition, as 'another's good.' To be 'just' in the popular sense is to be a means to the satisfaction of the ruler: to be 'unjust' in the popular sense, is to act for the satisfaction of oneself. But there is no reason, in the view of Thrasymachus, why it should be just for the ruler to get his own way, and yet, at the same time, unjust for others to do the like. What is true of the one is true of the rest: the real standard of action for any sensible man is to satisfy himself; and therefore, if we use the terms in their conventional sense, injustice, and not justice, is the real virtue and the true wisdom for all sensible men . . . In a word, the ordinary sense of moral terms must be inverted, if they are to correspond with reality."—Barker, op. cit., 156.

"Thrasymachus, instead of consistently maintaining that might is right and that whatever law the strong impose is *ipso facto* just, reintroduces the idea of justice in its conventional sense and now denounces it as a form of weakness. The trouble is that he once more fails to maintain his profession of realism: his original case was that, once the veil of hypocrisy has been removed, it would appear that justice is simply power: and the logical consequence of this is that a tyrant is not a very unjust man, but on the contrary a very just one. Thrasymachus, it seems, hesitates to say this and offers quite a different account of the meaning of Justice—i.e. that the multitude of weak men combine together in order to safeguard themselves against the aggression of the superman, and that the law which they impose is justice. This is a good example of the danger which attends any attempt to reverse the meaning of ethical terms."—Allan, op. cit., p. 29, cf. his note on 344c7—"The fact is that Thras. cannot offer a definition of Injustice because he has no consistent notion of it. Logically it ought to mean for him either (the interest of the weaker) or (the disadvantage of the stronger). He has, however, introduced a fresh complication by calling the strong man *unjust;* he seems to want to use 'justice' in the sense of his definition, but to continue to use 'injustice' in the ordinary sense."

position assigned to Thrasymachus in (1). The full table of equivalents in the light of the present passage will then have to be:—

A. Thrasymachus' own terminology.

1. Justice	as the interest of the stronger	for the ruler his own good
	and the disadvantage of the weaker	for the ruled, another's good
2. Injustice	as the disadvantage of the stronger	for the ruler, another's good
	and the interest of the weaker	for the ruled his own good

B. Traditional terminology.

1. Justice	as the disadvantage of the stronger	for the ruler, another's good
	and the interest of the weaker	for the ruled his own good
2. Injustice	as the interest of the stronger	for the ruler his own good
	and the disadvantage of the weaker	for the ruled, another's good

According to this scheme Thrasymachean Justice = Traditional Injustice (A1 = B2), and Thrasymachean Injustice = Traditional Justice (A2 = B1). We have thus a full reversal of ethical terms. Though somewhat complicated it would be a possible basis on which to conduct an argument about justice. I do not believe that any such scheme was ever envisaged by Thrasymachus or anyone else in the *Republic*, but as we have seen it has been asserted that Thrasymachus is attempting to argue with two terms, one from each terminology, namely, Thrasymachean Justice (A1) and Traditional Injustice (B2), and that he falls into confusion as a result.

When we attempt to apply this view of Thrasymachus' argument to the long speech the result will be as follows:—Thrasymachus begins with Thrasymachean Justice (A1)—" Justice is in reality the good of another, namely, the interest of the stronger and the ruler, and for the person who obeys and is subordinate, his own injury." Then Thrasymachus says " Injustice is the opposite ". We should expect this likewise to be Thrasymachean Injustice (A2), but we are immediately told that this Injustice " rules those very simple just souls, so that they minister solely to their master's advantage and happiness ". That is to say the Injustice here mentioned compels just people to seek the interests of the stronger. We must accordingly suppose that we have here Injustice in the Traditional Sense (B2).[24] The foolish just people seek the interest of the stronger, so that they will be just in the Thrasymachean sense (A1). Thrasymachus then goes on to compare the unjust man with the just man in respect of the advantages and disadvantages which result to each. He gives a series of cases where a man is in a position to choose between justice and injustice. The unjust ruler exploits his subjects—he is clearly unjust in the traditional sense (B2). The just ruler gains nothing for himself by his rule, but serves the interests of his subjects. He will be just in the traditional sense (B1).[25] Finally in the last sentence of the speech Thrasymachus says that injustice (clearly B2) is stronger than justice (presumably B1 about which he has just been talking) and so justice is the interest of the stronger (A1) and injustice is the interest and advantage of oneself. As the " oneself " is not specified to be either stronger or weaker, this might be either B2 (the ruler) or A2 (the ruled). The latter might seem more natural, but the repetition of the passage in Book II (367c4-5) seems to make it clear that here also B2 is intended.

This clearly would involve an extraordinary and confusing alternation in the senses of the words Justice and Injustice. In the first sentence we begin with A1 and move to B2. We then proceed with B1 and B2. Then in the last sentence we have B2, ?B1, then A1 and again B2. The shift from one category to another would twice take place in the middle of a sentence. But an even more serious

[24] This is recognised by Allan. See his note on 344c7 quoted above at the end of n. 23.

[25] In the case of commercial dealings, partnerships and the payment of taxes the categories hardly apply, as neither the just man nor the unjust man are either stronger or weaker in relation to one another. If however the unjust man is supposed to be the stronger just because he is u just, and the just man the weaker, we have B2 and A1 respectively.

difficulty arises. In the first sentence the phrase "is the opposite" is deprived of all meaning: Injustice in sense B2 is not the opposite of Justice in sense A1, but is identical with it. Even if Thrasymachus is confused it seems impossible that he can have become as confused as this would imply.

Two expedients which might suggest themselves can hardly be accepted. (1) Take the "injustice which is the opposite" as meaning A2 and suppose that it is a phrase in parenthesis. The previous "justice and the just" will then become the subject of the following "rules" and the sentence will run: "justice is really the good of another, the advantage of the stronger who rules, but the self-inflicted injury of the subject who obeys (A1), (injustice is the opposite, the disadvantage of the stronger and the interest of the subject—A2), justice rules those very simple just souls (A1 rules A1).[26] This at least postpones the change to B1 and B2 until a later part of the spee

(2) Suppose that the "

point of view of the ruler, and that "the very simple just souls" are the foolish *rulers*, who are deceived by the traditional morality and so spare their subjects. The sentence will then run: "justice is really the good of another, the advantage of the stronger who rules, but the self-inflicted injury of the subject who obeys (A1). Injustice is the opposite (A2) and rules the minds[28] of those rulers only who are simple and so just (B1). The ruled serve the advantage of the stronger, and by their obedience serve his happiness and not their own (A1)." But this is out of the frying pan into the fire—it gives a sense to "injustice is the opposite" only by making the confusion between the two senses of justice and injustice worse than on the usual view, and in addition it requires us to take "rules" in two quite different senses when the words are almost side by side.

In fact the attempt to interpret the speech along the lines of a "reversal of ethical terms" seems to spring from a mistake—the failure to recognise that Thrasymachus is introducing a new term which stands at the beginning of his statement—"another's good". He is not attempting to reverse the ordinary meaning of ethical terms at all—what he is doing is to restate the traditional views of justice[29] and injustice in a rather clever way to suit his own argument. Throughout he has only one conception of justice and one conception of injustice:—

Justice—Another's good,	so	for the ruler the interest of the weaker for the ruled the interest of the stronger
Injustice—One's own good,	so	for the ruler the interest of the stronger for the ruled the interest of the weaker

Thrasymachus begins by saying that justice is in reality[30] seeking another's good, and this he considers is implied by the traditional view as defended by Socrates, as well as being his own view. So for example the subject acting in accordance with justice will seek the interest of the stronger. He might have added "While the ruler acting in accordance with justice will seek the interest of the weaker, which for the ruler is the good of another"—this is implied a little later in 343e1-7. Injustice is exactly the opposite of this, namely to seek one's own good. So for example in the person of the ruler, injustice rules over the foolish just subjects who seek the ruler's interest. He might have added that a subject who is unjust will be disobedient to the ruler and so seeking his own interest, cf. 338e5-6. Throughout the following part of the speech Thrasymachus always uses justice in the sense of

[26] This interpretation is found in the eighteenth century translation of Dr. Spens, and also in that by Thomas Taylor.

[27] The balance of the phrases in the Greek makes this clear by itself—to each of the terms applied to justice there is a balancing phrase applied to injustice. Moreover the *μέν* in *ἡ μὲν δικαιοσύνη* would be left without an answering *δέ* if *ἡ δὲ ἀδικία τοὐναντίον* is taken as parenthetical.

[28] For this use of *ἄρχω* cf. Phaedrus 238a.

[29] For "another's Good" as a traditional view of Justice, see Aristotle, E.N. V. 1134b5 and 1129a3.

[30] Allan on 343c4 would alter the punctuation to read "justice is seeking another's good, in reality the interest of the stronger" cf. Phaedrus 238c. This would fit equally well with the above interpretation.

seeking another's good, and injustice in the sense of seeking one's own good. In the final sentence he says that injustice (seeking one's own good) is thus stronger and more aristocratic and more master-like than justice. Justice in practice (when looked at from the point of view of the ruled) amounts to seeking the interest of the stronger as being another's interest, while injustice, which is normally possible for the ruler only, is profitable and advantageous to oneself.

It is only in this way I believe that a consistent account can be given of what Thrasymachus has to say in his long speech. He interprets the view of justice which Socrates is offering as meaning that justice consists in seeking the good of another. Socrates had implied that this was the duty of the ruler in his discussion of the art of ruling. Thrasymachus treats it both from the point of view of the ruler and the point of view of the ruled, and accepts it as a correct account of justice. But he draws the corollary that only foolish people will be just—the just ruled are foolish in seeking the interest of the ruler (343c6-9) and the just ruler is foolish in seeking the interest of the ruled and not his own interest (343e1-6, 348c11-12).

Moreover this is perfectly consistent with all that Thrasymachus has already said, as long as we do not wrongly attribute to him the doctrine that it is just for the ruler to seek his own interest.
by Thrasymachus (338c1-339a4) shows that he is already speaking scornfully of justice—it is because justice amounts in practice to seeking the interest of the ruler that it is foolish to be just. Thus the statement that Justice is the interest of the stronger cannot be treated as a *definition* in Thrasymachus' eyes—rather it is a deliberate paradox framed in terms such as to arrest the attention, and Socrates seems to refer to this fact when he does at last express himself satisfied that he has arrived at the true position which Thrasymachus holds (349a6-8).[31] In fact it seems clear that Thrasymachus is speaking from the point of view of the ruled only, when he says that justice is the interest of the stronger. Socrates understands it in this way as can be seen from his question about Pulydamas (338c5). Again when speaking of the laws which the rulers set up, Thrasymachus says (338e3), " they declare to be just *for their subjects* whatever is for their own interest." Thrasymachus carefully " for their subjects."[32] Finally the very form of the statement " justice is the interest of the stronger " suggests it is viewed from the point of view of the ruled. If Thrasymachus had meant to describe a just ruler he would surely have said something like " justice is the oppression of the weaker."
" justice is the interest of the stronger " is made from the point of view of the ruled, it will be clear that this justice is " another's good " in the terms of the long speech, and we have perfect consistency between Thrasymachus' first statement about justice and what he says in the long speech.

What evidence can be drawn from the set speech as to the nature of Thrasymachus' theory in terms of our original propositions (Positions I-IV)? Thrasymachus has now openly expressed his scorn for justice and his admiration of injustice. Injustice he holds is far more profitable than justice, at least when successfully pursued. When asked for further elucidation by Socrates, he brings injustice into close relation with virtue, good counsel and nobility of action, and those who practise it are called good and wise (348b8-e9). In summing up Thrasymachus' position (348e9-349a3), Socrates says it is clear that Thrasymachus will assign to injustice *all* the predicates which Socrates and others assign to justice; and Thrasymachus agrees. This should make it clear that for Thrasymachus injustice is a moral obligation, in all the senses in which for Socrates justice is a moral obligation. This being the case, it is obvious that Thrasymachus does not hold a nihilist view (Position I)—if he were denying the existence of any moral

[31] It is worth noting that when there is occasion to refer to the doctrine of Thrasymachus in Book II of the *Republic*, it is the definition of the long speech which is reproduced, rather than the earlier statement that justice is simply the interest of the stronger (367c2-5).

[32] This vital qualifying phrase is omitted altogether in Lindsay's translation of the passage.

obligation at all, he could not assign to injustice the predicates normally given to justice as a moral ideal at which people ought to aim.

If Thrasymachus held the legalist view (Position II), his admiration for injustice would be strictly irrelevant. But as the legalist position is itself ethically neutral, he could if he wished praise injustice without any inconsistency. But he could not have chosen the tyrant as his example of the supremely just man, nor could he strictly have spoken of a just ruler either. If justice has no existence apart from legal justice, in other words justice made by the laws, then the person who makes the laws cannot be either just or unjust, he will be above or outside justice altogether. As this is clearly not the view of Thrasymachus, we must suppose he did not hold the legalist view.

It should also be clear by now that Thrasymachus is far from being a psychological egoist (Position IV). His view is that justice is folly and unwisdom, whether practised by rulers (348c12), ruled (343c6), or men in other relationships such as partnerships (349b2-5).[33] He holds that men *are* sometimes just and so pursue the interests of others. The term "folly" applied to them shows that he thinks this is due to foolish ideas on their part and not to external compulsion. This would be quite consistent with psychological egoism provided that the foolish ideas were simply mistaken ideas as to where one's true interest lay. But it seems clear that Thrasymachus regarded the ruled as foolish because they do not attempt to pursue their own interest, but the interest of the ruler, because they think they ought to pursue another's interest rather than their own, or at least because they think they ought to be just against their own interests (cf. 343c6 seq.). The greater advantages of injustice seem to be a gospel which Thrasymachus is himself preaching. I think therefore we must conclude that Thrasymachus was not a psychological egoist.

There remains the natural right theory (Position III). It is only if Thrasymachus is setting up some moral ideal other than and opposed to that of justice that his argument becomes intelligible. This ideal is that of injustice, which consists in seeking one's own interest on all occasions. Thrasymachus maintains that the way to promote one's own interest is to seek it directly in every particular situation. He does not use the terminology of those who opposed law and nature,[34] but his equation of injustice with virtue (Arete) shows that he did regard injustice as a fulfilment of men's natures. Accordingly he is rightly to be placed among the proponents of the theory of natural right.

An examination of the later part of Book I of the *Republic* shows that Thrasymachus still maintains the same position against the elaborate onslaught of Socrates. But the arguments there raise many difficulties of interpretation which it is not possible to discuss here. Nor is it possible to enter upon the many interesting implications of Thrasymachus' doctrine, if the above account of his position is correct. One only may be mentioned. In urging the weaker to disobey the laws Thrasymachus is clearly rejecting the rule of law in society, at least where the ruler is a tyrant or an aristocracy. But he held that all ruling bodies including democracies make or ought to make laws in their own interests (338e). In the case of a democracy then, the laws would be seeking the interests of the people as a whole or at least of the majority of them. While they might conflict with the interests of any one individual, they would also be promoting his interest in so far as he was a member of society. It only needs the assumption of a partial community of interests for Thrasymachus' theory to be converted into a defence of democratic government. Of course Thrasymachus does not draw out this implication in any way, but it is probably a mistake to regard his theory as necessarily subversive of all society, or as intended by him to be so.

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[33] There is nothing to suggest that Thrasymachus thought that the weaker were consulting their interests by being just and obeying the laws when unable to resist. Rather they ought to break them on all occasions when they have a reasonable chance of escaping detection (cf. 348d6-9).

[34] For this opposition see F. Heinimman, *Nomos und Physis*, Basel, 1945.