

What Is the Completely Unjust Person Like?

1 According to Thrasymachus

Consider him [a person of great power] if you want to figure out how much more advantageous it is for the individual to be just rather than unjust. You'll understand this most easily if you turn your thoughts to the most complete injustice, the one that makes the doer of injustice happiest and the sufferers of it, who are unwilling to do injustice, most wretched. This is tyranny, which through stealth or force appropriates the property of others, whether sacred or profane, public or private, not little by little, but all at once. If someone commits only one part of injustice and is caught, he's punished and greatly reproached — such partly unjust people are called temple-robbers, kidnappers, housebreakers, robbers, and thieves when they commit these crimes. But when someone, in addition to appropriating their possessions, kidnaps and enslaves the citizens as well, instead of these shameful names he is called happy and blessed, not only by the citizens themselves, but by all who learn that he has done the whole of injustice. (344a-c)

2 According to Glaucon

we must suppose that an unjust person will act as clever craftsmen do: A first-rate captain or doctor, for example, knows the difference between what his craft can and cannot do. He attempts the first but lets the second go by In the same way, an unjust person's successful attempts at injustice must remain undetected, if he is to be fully unjust. Anyone who is caught should be thought inept, for the extreme of injustice is to be believed to be just without being just. And our completely unjust person must be given complete injustice We must allow that, while doing the greatest injustice, he has nonetheless provided himself with the greatest reputation for justice. ... If any of his unjust activities should be discovered, he must be able to speak persuasively or to use force. And if force is needed he must have the help of courage and strength and of the substantial wealth and friends he has provided himself with. (360e-361a)

3 The conclusion of the third argument in Book 9

Then can't we confidently assert that those desires of even the money-loving and honor-loving parts that follow knowledge and argument and pursue with their help those pleasures that reason approves will attain the truest pleasures possible for them, because they follow truth, and the ones that are most their own, if indeed what is best for each thing is most its own? ... Therefore, when the entire soul follows the philosophic part, and there is no civil war in it, each part of it does its own work exclusively and is just, and in particular it enjoys its own pleasures, the best and truest pleasures possible for it. ... But when one of the other parts gains control, it won't be able to secure its own pleasure and will compel the other parts to pursue an alien and untrue pleasure. (586d-e)

4 And then there is this implausibly precise claim

if someone wants to say how far a king's pleasure is from a tyrant's, he'll find, if he completes the calculation, that a king lives seven hundred and twenty-nine times more pleasantly than a tyrant and that a tyrant is the same number of times more wretched. (587e)

5 Finally, a nice summary of Plato's conception of the state

to insure that someone like that [a manual worker] is ruled by something similar to what rules the best person, we say that he ought to be the slave of that best person who has a divine ruler within himself. It isn't to harm the slave that we say he must be ruled, which is what Thrasymachus thought to be true of all subjects, but because it is better for everyone to be ruled by divine reason, preferably within himself and his own, otherwise imposed from without, so that as far as possible all will be alike and friends, governed by the same thing. (590d)