

GLAUCON: Yes, exactly.

454a SOCRATES: What a noble power, Glaucon, the craft of disputation⁹ possesses!

GLAUCON: Why is that?

5 SOCRATES: Because many people seem to me to fall into it even against their wills, and think they are engaging not in eristic,¹⁰ but in discussion. This happens because they are unable to examine what has been said by dividing it up into kinds. Instead, it is on the purely verbal level that they look for the contradiction in what has been said, and employ eristic, not dialectic, on one another.

10 GLAUCON: Yes, that certainly does happen to many people. But surely it is not pertinent to us at the moment, is it?

b SOCRATES: It most certainly is. At any rate, we are in danger of unconsciously dealing in disputation.

GLAUCON: How?

5 SOCRATES: We are trying to establish the principle that different natures should not be assigned the same pursuits in a bold and eristic manner, *on the verbal level*. But we did not at all investigate what kind of natural difference or sameness we had in mind, or in what regard the distinction was pertinent, when we assigned different pursuits to different natures and the same ones to the same.

10 GLAUCON: No, we did not investigate that.

c SOCRATES: And because we did not, it is open to us, apparently, to ask ourselves whether the natures of bald and long-haired men are the same or opposite. And, once we agree that they are opposite, it is open to us to forbid the long-haired ones to be shoemakers, if that is what the bald ones are
5 to be, or *vice versa*.

GLAUCON: But that would be ridiculous.

d SOCRATES: And is it ridiculous for any other reason than that we did not have in mind *every* kind of difference and sameness in nature, but were keeping our eyes only on the kind of difference and sameness that was pertinent to the pursuits themselves? We meant, for example, that a male and female whose souls are suited for medicine have the same nature. Or don't you think so?

GLAUCON: I do.

5 SOCRATES: But a male doctor and a male carpenter have different ones?

⁹ See Glossary of Terms s.v. disputation.

¹⁰ See Glossary of Terms s.v. eristic.

GLAUCON: Of course, completely different.

SOCRATES: In the case of both the male and the female sex, then, if one of them is shown to be different from the other with regard to a particular craft or pursuit, we will say that is the one who should be assigned to it. But if it is apparent that they differ in this respect alone, that the female bears the offspring while the male mounts the female, we will say it has not yet been demonstrated that a woman is different from a man with regard to what we are talking about, and we will continue to believe our guardians and their women should have the same pursuits.

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GLAUCON: And rightly so.

SOCRATES: Next, won't we urge our opponent to tell us the precise craft or pursuit, relevant to the organization of the city, for which a woman's nature and a man's are not the same but different?

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GLAUCON: That would be a fair question, at least.

SOCRATES: Perhaps, then, this other person might say, just as you did a moment ago,¹¹ that it is not easy to give an adequate answer on the spur of the moment, but that after reflection it would not be at all difficult.

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GLAUCON: Yes, he might say that.

SOCRATES: Do you want us to ask the one who disputes things in this way, then, to follow us to see whether we can somehow show him that there is no pursuit relevant to the management of the city that is peculiar to women?

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GLAUCON: Of course.

SOCRATES: Come on, then, we will say to him, give us an answer: "Is this what you meant by one person being naturally well suited for something and another naturally unsuited: that the one learns it easily, the other with difficulty; that the one, after a little instruction, can discover a lot for himself in the subject being studied, whereas the other, even if he gets a lot of instruction and attention, does not even retain what he was taught; that the bodily capacities of the one adequately serve his mind, while those of the other obstruct his? Are there any other factors than these, by which you distinguish a person who is naturally well suited for each pursuit from one who is not?"

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GLAUCON: No one will be able to mention any others.

SOCRATES: Do you know of anything practiced by human beings, then, at which the male sex is not superior to the female in all those ways? Or must we make a long story of it by discussing weaving and the preparation of

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¹¹ 453c7–9.

d baked and boiled food¹²—the very pursuits in which the female sex is thought to excel, and in which its defeat would expose it to the greatest ridicule of all?

5 GLAUCON: It is true that the one sex shows greater mastery than the other in pretty much every area. Yet there are many women who are better than many men at many things. But on the whole, it is as you say.

SOCRATES: Then, my friend, there is no pursuit relevant to the management of the city that belongs to a woman because she is a woman, or to a man because he is a man; but the various natural capacities are distributed in a similar way between both creatures, and women can share by nature in every pursuit, and men in every one, though for the purposes of all of them e women are weaker than men.¹³

GLAUCON: Of course.

SOCRATES: So shall we assign all of them to men and none to women?

5 GLAUCON: How could we?

SOCRATES: We could not. For we will say, I imagine, that one woman is suited for medicine, another not, and that one is naturally musical, another not.

GLAUCON: Of course.

456a SOCRATES: Won't one be suited for physical training or war, then, while another is unwarlike and not a lover of physical training?

GLAUCON: I suppose so.

5 SOCRATES: And one a philosopher (lover of wisdom), another a “misosopher” (hater of wisdom)? And one spirited, another spiritless?

GLAUCON: That too.

SOCRATES: So there is also a woman who is suited to be a guardian, and one who is not. Or wasn't that the sort of nature we selected for our male guardians, too?¹⁴

GLAUCON: It certainly was.

10 SOCRATES: A woman and a man can have the same nature, then, relevant to guarding the city—except to the extent that she is weaker and he is stronger.

GLAUCON: Apparently so.

¹² Men were in charge of roasting meat. See 404b10–c4.

¹³ *Epi pasi*: The claim is not that no woman is stronger or better than any man in any such pursuit (which would contradict 455d4–5), but that the physical weakness of women is a relevant factor in all of them. See 451e1–2, 456a10–11.

¹⁴ 374e4–376c5.

SOCRATES: Women of that sort, then, must be selected to live and guard with men of the same sort, since they are competent to do so and are akin to the men by nature. b

GLAUCON: Of course.

SOCRATES: And mustn't we assign the same pursuits to the same natures? 5

GLAUCON: Yes, the same ones.

SOCRATES: We have come around, then, to what we said before, and we are agreed that it is not against nature to assign musical and physical training to the female guardians. 10

GLAUCON: Absolutely.

SOCRATES: So, we are not legislating impossibilities or mere fantasies, at any rate, since the law we were proposing is in accord with nature. Rather, it is the contrary laws that we have now that turn out to be more contrary to nature, it seems. c

GLAUCON: It does seem that way.

SOCRATES: Now, wasn't our inquiry about whether our proposals were both viable and best? 5

GLAUCON: Yes, it was.

SOCRATES: And that they are in fact viable has been agreed, hasn't it?

GLAUCON: Yes.

SOCRATES: So, we must next come to an agreement about whether they are for the best?

GLAUCON: Clearly. 10

SOCRATES: Now, as regards producing a woman who is equipped for guardianship, we won't have one sort of education that will produce our guardian men, will we, and another our women—especially not when it will have the same nature to work on in both cases? d

GLAUCON: No, we won't.

SOCRATES: What is your belief about this, then?

GLAUCON: What?

SOCRATES: The notion that one man is better or worse than another—or do you think they are all alike? 5

GLAUCON: Not at all.

SOCRATES: In the city we are founding, who do you think will turn out to be better men: our guardians, who get the education we have described, or the shoemakers, who are educated in shoemaking? 10

GLAUCON: What a ridiculous question!

e SOCRATES: I realize that. Aren't the guardians the best of the citizens?

GLAUCON: By far.

SOCRATES: And what about the female guardians? Won't they be the best of the women?

5 GLAUCON: Yes, they are by far the best, too.

SOCRATES: Is there anything better for a city than that the best possible men and women should come to exist in it?

GLAUCON: No, there is not.

457a SOCRATES: And that is what musical and physical training, employed as we have described, will achieve?

GLAUCON: Of course.

SOCRATES: Then the law we were proposing was not only possible, but also best for a city?

5 GLAUCON: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then the female guardians must strip, clothing themselves in virtue instead of cloaks.¹⁵ They must share in warfare, and whatever else guarding the city involves, and do nothing else. But within these areas, the women must be assigned lighter tasks than the men, because of the weak-
10 ness of their sex. And the man who laughs at the sight of women stripped for physical training, when their stripping is for the best, is "plucking the
b unripe fruit of laughter's wisdom,"¹⁶ and knows nothing, it seems, about what he is laughing at or what he is doing. For it is, and always will be, the
5 finest saying that what is beneficial is beautiful; what is harmful ugly.

GLAUCON: Absolutely.

SOCRATES: May we claim, then, that we are avoiding one wave,¹⁷ as it were, in our discussion of the law about women, so that we are not alto-
c together swept away when we declare that our male and female guardians must share all their pursuits, and that our argument is somehow self-consistent when it states that this is both viable and beneficial?

GLAUCON: It is certainly no small wave that you are avoiding.

5 SOCRATES: You won't think it is so big when you see the next one.

GLAUCON: I won't see it unless you tell me about it.¹⁸

SOCRATES: The law that is consistent with that one, and with the others that preceded it, is this, I take it.

¹⁵ See Glossary of Terms s.v. cloak.

¹⁶ Plato is adapting a phrase of Pindar.

¹⁷ The metaphor begins at 453c10–d7.

¹⁸ See 432c3–4.

GLAUCON: What?

SOCRATES: That all these women should be shared among all the men, that no individual woman and man should live together, and that the children, too, should be shared, with no parent knowing its own offspring, and no child its parent. 10 d

GLAUCON: That wave *is* far bigger and more dubitable than the other, both as regards its viability and its benefit. 5

SOCRATES: As far as its benefit is concerned, at least, I do not think anyone would argue that the sharing of women and children is not the greatest good, if indeed it is viable. But I imagine there would be a lot of dispute about whether or not it is viable.

GLAUCON: No, *both* could very well be disputed. e

SOCRATES: You mean I will have to face a coalition of arguments. I thought I had at least escaped one of them—namely, whether you thought the proposal was beneficial—and that I would just be left with the argument about whether it is viable or not.

GLAUCON: Well, you did not escape unnoticed. So you will have to give an argument for both.

SOCRATES: I must pay the penalty. But do me this favor: let me take a holiday and act like those lazy people who make a banquet for themselves of their own thoughts when they are walking alone. People like that, as you know, do not bother to find out how any of their appetites might actually be fulfilled, so as to avoid the trouble of deliberating about what is possible and what is not. They assume that what they want is available, and then proceed to arrange all the rest, taking pleasure in going through everything they will do when they get it—thus making their already lazy souls even lazier. Well, I, too, am succumbing to this weakness at the moment and want to postpone consideration of the viability of our proposals until later. I will assume now that they are viable, if you will permit me to do so, and examine how the rulers will arrange them when they come to pass. And I will try to show that, if they were put into practice, they would be the most beneficial arrangements of all, both for the city and for its guardians. These are the things I will try to examine with you first, leaving the others for later—if indeed you will permit this. 458a 5 b 5

GLAUCON: You have my permission; so proceed with the examination.

SOCRATES: Well, then, I imagine that if indeed our rulers, and likewise their auxiliaries, are worthy of their names, the latter will be prepared to carry out orders, and the former to give orders, obeying our laws in some cases and imitating them in the others that we leave to their discretion. c

GLAUCON: Probably so. 5

d SOCRATES: Now, you are their lawgiver, and in just the way you selected these men, you will select as the women to hand over to them those who have natures as similar to theirs as possible. And because they have shared dwellings and meals, and none of them has any private property of that sort, they will live together; and through mixing together in the gymnasia and in the rest of their daily life, they will be driven by innate necessity, I take it, to have sex with one another. Or don't you think I am talking about necessities here?

5 GLAUCON: Not *geometric* necessities, certainly, but *erotic* ones; and they probably have a sharper capacity to persuade and attract most people.

e SOCRATES: They do, indeed. But the next point, Glaucon, is that for them to have unregulated sexual intercourse with one another, or to do anything else of that sort, would not be a pious thing in a city of happy people, and the rulers won't allow it.

GLAUCON: No, it would not be just.

SOCRATES: It is clear, then, that we will next have to make marriages as sacred as possible. And sacred marriages will be those that are most beneficial.

5 GLAUCON: Absolutely.

459a SOCRATES: How, then, will the most beneficial ones come about? Tell me this, Glaucon. I see you have hunting dogs and quite a flock of noble birds at home.¹⁹ Have you, by Zeus, noticed anything in particular about their
5 "marriages" and breeding?

GLAUCON: Like what?

SOCRATES: In the first place, though they are all noble animals, aren't there some that are, or turn out to be, the very best?

GLAUCON: There are.

10 SOCRATES: Do you breed from them all to the same extent, then, or do you try hard to breed as far as possible from the best ones?

GLAUCON: From the best ones.

b SOCRATES: And do you breed from the youngest, the oldest, or as far as possible from those in their prime?

GLAUCON: From those in their prime.

5 SOCRATES: And if they were not bred in this way, do you think that your race of birds and dogs would get much worse?

GLAUCON: I do.

SOCRATES: And what do you think about horses and other animals? Is the situation any different with them?

¹⁹ Both hunting dogs and aviaries were common in rich Greek households.

GLAUCON: It would be strange if it were.

SOCRATES: Good heavens, my dear comrade! Then our need for eminent rulers is quite desperate, if indeed the same also holds for the human race. 10

GLAUCON: Well, it does hold of them. But so what? c

SOCRATES: It follows that our rulers will then have to employ a great many drugs. You know that when people do not need drugs for their bodies, and they are prepared to follow a regimen, we regard even an inferior doctor as adequate. But when drugs are needed, we know that a much bolder doctor is required. 5

GLAUCON: That's true. But what is your point?

SOCRATES: This: it looks as though our rulers will have to employ a great many lies and deceptions for the benefit of those they rule. And you remember, I suppose, we said all such things were useful as a kind of drug.²⁰ d

GLAUCON: And we were correct.

SOCRATES: Well, in the case of marriages and procreation, its correctness is particularly evident. 5

GLAUCON: How so?

SOCRATES: It follows from our previous agreement that the best men should mate with the best women in as many cases as possible, while the opposite should hold of the worst men and women; and that the offspring of the former should be reared, but not that of the latter, if our flock is going to be an eminent one. And all this must occur without anyone knowing except the rulers—if, again, our herd of guardians is to remain as free from faction as possible. e

GLAUCON: That's absolutely right.

SOCRATES: So then, we will have to establish by law certain festivals and sacrifices at which we will bring together brides and bridegrooms, and our poets must compose suitable hymns for the marriages that take place. We will leave the number of marriages for the rulers to decide. That will enable them to keep the number of males as constant as possible, taking into account war, disease, and everything of that sort; so that the city will, as far as possible, become neither too big nor too small.²¹ 5 460a

GLAUCON: That's right.

SOCRATES: I imagine that some sophisticated lotteries will have to be created, then, so that an inferior person of that sort will blame chance rather than the rulers at each mating time. 10

²⁰ 382c6–d3.

²¹ See 423b4–c5.

GLAUCON: Yes, indeed.

b SOCRATES: And presumably, the young men who are good at war or at
other things must—among other prizes and awards—be given a greater
opportunity to have sex with the women, in order that a pretext may also
5 be created at the same time for having as many children as possible fathered
by such men.

GLAUCON: That's right.

SOCRATES: And then, as offspring are born, won't they be taken by the
officials appointed for this purpose, whether these are men or women or
10 both—for surely our offices are also open to both women and men.

GLAUCON: Yes.

c SOCRATES: And I suppose they will take the offspring of good parents to
the rearing pen and hand them over to special nurses who live in a separate
part of the city. But those of inferior parents, or any deformed offspring of
5 the others, they will hide in a secret and unknown place, as is fitting.²²

GLAUCON: Yes, if indeed the race of guardians is going to remain pure.

d SOCRATES: And won't these nurses also take care of the children's feeding
by bringing the mothers to the rearing pen when their breasts are full,
while devising every device²³ to ensure that no mother will recognize her
offspring? And won't they provide other women as wet nurses if the moth-
ers themselves have insufficient milk—taking care, however, that the moth-
ers breast-feed the children for only a moderate period of time, and
5 assigning sleepless nights and similar burdens to the nurses and wet nurses?

GLAUCON: You are making childbearing a soft job for the guardians' women.

SOCRATES: Yes, properly so. But let's take up the next thing we proposed.
We said, as you know, that offspring should be bred from parents who are
10 in their prime.²⁴

GLAUCON: True.

e SOCRATES: Do you agree that a woman's prime lasts, on average, for a
period of twenty years and a man's for thirty?

GLAUCON: Which years are those?

SOCRATES: A woman should bear children for the city from the age of
twenty to that of forty; whereas a man should beget them for the city

²² Infanticide by exposure was commonly used in ancient Greece as a method of birth control.

²³ See 414b8–c2.

²⁴ 452b1–3.

from the time that he passes his peak as a runner until he reaches fifty-five.²⁵

GLAUCON: At any rate, that is the physical and mental prime for both. 461a

SOCRATES: Then if any male who is younger or older than that engages in reproduction for the community, we will say that his offense is neither pious nor just. For the child he fathers for the city, if it escapes discovery, 5
will be begotten and born without the benefit of sacrifices, or of the prayers that priestesses, priests, and the entire city will offer at every marriage festival, asking that from good and beneficial parents ever better and more beneficial offspring should be produced. On the contrary, it will be b
born in darkness through a terrible act of lack of self-control.

GLAUCON: That's right.

SOCRATES: The same law will apply if a man who is still of breeding age has sex with a woman in her prime when the rulers have not mated them. 5
We will say that he is imposing an illegitimate, unauthorized, and unholy child on the city.

GLAUCON: That's absolutely right.

SOCRATES: But when women and men have passed breeding age, I imagine we will leave them free to have sex with whomever they wish—except that a man may not have sex with his daughter, mother, daughters' daughters, or mother's female ancestors, or a woman with her son and his descendants or her father and his ancestors. And we will permit all that only after telling them to be very careful not to let even a single fetus see the light of day, if one should happen to be conceived; but if one does force its way 5
out, they must dispose of it on the understanding that no nurture is available for such a child.

GLAUCON: All that sounds reasonable. But how will they recognize one another's fathers, daughters, and the others you mentioned? d

SOCRATES: They won't. Instead, from the day a man becomes a bridegroom, he will call all offspring born in the tenth month afterward (and in

²⁵ Greek women were often married before they turned twenty. The puzzling characterization of the minimum age for male procreation is, perhaps, explained by a passage from Aristotle's *Politics*: "As to the bodily characteristics in parents that are most beneficial to the offspring being produced. . . . Neither the physical condition of athletes nor that of one who is overly reliant on medical treatment and poorly suited to exertion is useful from the point of view of health or procreation, or is the condition needed in a good citizen. But the condition that is in a mean between these two is useful for these purposes. The proper physical condition, therefore, is one that is achieved by exertion, but not by violent exertion, and that promotes not just one thing, as the athletic condition does, but the actions of free people. And these should be provided to women and men alike" (7.16 1335^b2–12).

the seventh, of course) his sons,²⁶ if they are male, and his daughters, if they
 5 are female; and they will call him father. Similarly, he will call their children
 his grandchildren, and they, in turn, will call the group to which he belongs
 grandfathers and grandmothers. And those who were born at the same time
 e as their mothers and fathers were breeding, they will call their brothers and
 sisters. Thus, as we were saying just now, they will avoid sexual relations
 with each other. However, the law *will* allow brothers and sisters to have sex
 with one another, if the lottery works out that way and the Pythia
 approves.²⁷

GLAUCON: You are absolutely right.

5 SOCRATES: That, then, Glaucon, or something like it, is how the sharing
 of women and children by the guardians of your city will be handled. The
 next point we need to have confirmed by argument, then, is that this
 arrangement is both consistent with the rest of the constitution and by far
 the best. Isn't that so?

462a GLAUCON: Yes, by Zeus, it is.

SOCRATES: As a beginning step toward reaching agreement, shouldn't we
 ask ourselves what we think is the greatest good for the organization of the
 city—the one at which the legislator should aim in making its laws—and
 5 what the greatest evil? And then examine whether what we have just
 described is in harmony with the tracks of the good we have found, and in
 disharmony with those of the bad?

GLAUCON: Absolutely.

SOCRATES: Now, do we know of any greater evil for a city than what tears
 b it apart and makes it many instead of one? Or any greater good than what
 binds it together and makes it one?

GLAUCON: No, we do not.

SOCRATES: Well, doesn't sharing pleasure and pain bind it together—
 5 when, as far as possible, all the citizens feel more or less the same joy or
 pain at the same gains or losses?

GLAUCON: Absolutely.

SOCRATES: On the other hand, doesn't the privatization of these things dis-
 solve the city—when some are overwhelmed with distress and others over-
 c joyed by the same things happening to the city or some of its inhabitants?

GLAUCON: Of course.

²⁶ These are lunar months. The period is from roughly seven to roughly nine calen-
 dar months. A fetus of less than seven months was considered nonviable.

²⁷ Greek law did not usually permit marriage between biological siblings, who will
 be included in the class referred to here. See 427c3.