Reading. Plato, Republic, Book I, entire. References to the text below are based upon the Grube/Reeve translation included in the Hackett volume.

Introduction. The opening book of the Republic presents Socrates discussing three distinct accounts of justice in the persons of Cephalus, Polemarchus and Thrasymachus. The questions are about Socrates’ arguments with Polemarchus and Thrasymachus, and so omit those with Cephalus. The questions below are grouped accordingly QP and QT.

Republic, Book I, is presumably a Socratic dialogue. This means that, although it is authored by Plato, it presents the views and arguments of the historical person, Socrates. Socratic dialogues are contrasted with Platonic dialogues, those of Plato’s dialogues that present the views and arguments of the historical Plato. The remaining nine books of the Republic seem to be Platonic. Book I’s being Socratic also means that those Socratic principles which have appeared in the passages discussed in class—coming as they do from other Socratic dialogues—may appear yet again, or be relied upon, or be expanded upon, here. In other words, we should expect, at the very least, that what Socrates is trying to accomplish in Book I is consistent with what he has accomplished elsewhere.1

The opening argument takes place with Cephalus, Polemarchus’ father. According to Cephalus, justice is always telling the truth and always repaying one’s debts (331c1-2). Socrates’ argument against this position is that, sometimes, following such rules can be harmful. For example: Suppose you borrow a weapon from a friend and promise to return it the next day at noon. At noon the next day—you overhear a heated argument taking place within your friend’s house. At one point, your friend yells, “I am going to kill you! Where’s my gun?!” At that moment, the clock strikes noon, so you knock on the door to hand over your friend’s gun. The point of Socrates’ example (which I have embellished only slightly…) is presumably that it can sometimes be harmful to people to pay back debts owed (return the weapon) or to tell the truth. But harm is always a bad thing, and justice is always a good thing. So Cephalus’ definition of justice must be wrong. Cephalus accepts this conclusion, but then is called away and leaves the discussion.

Cephalus’ son, Polemarchus takes over the discussion at this point, and defines justice as, “Giving to each what is owed to him or her, namely, giving one’s to friends what is good for them, benefit (332a7), and to one’s enemies what is bad for them, harm (332b6-8). Notice that Polemarchus and his father evidently agree that justice is a matter of giving to someone what is owed them. What they disagree over is who the recipients are of justice and what is owed them (for Cephalus, the truth and things borrowed are owed to everyone without exception; for Polemarchus, benefits are owed to friends and harm is owed to enemies). Notice, too, that Polemarchus adjusts his account slightly (332b7) by exchanging the word ‘appropriate’ for ‘owed’. His idea, then, seems to be that justice is giving to friends what’s appropriate for them (good things), and to enemies what’s appropriate for them (bad things). My friends are those who are good to me (and so warrant good things from me), and my enemies are those who are bad to me (and so warrant bad things from me).

Questions.

1 This reasoning presupposes that Socrates indeed has a coherent philosophical view of his own, and that he’s philosophically skilled enough to know what ideas are consistent with what. Not all scholars make these presumptions, though I myself do. If you think these presumptions are not warranted, or shouldn’t otherwise be made, then you oughtn’t to exploit them in constructing your answers.
QP.

- (ii) The few lines from 332c4 – d7 are puzzling. This is because it seems to merely restate what’s already been accomplished at 332a7-b7. In both passages, the result is that Socrates gets Polemarchus to define justice (and, indeed, he gives the same definition in each case). What should we make of this second passage, then (332c4-d7)? Is this sloppy writing on Plato’s part (because, after all, he merely repeats himself), or is some philosophical progress made with this second passage? If the latter, what’s the philosophical progress? Or is there yet some other solution to the puzzle?

- (iii) What’s established by Socrates’ subsequent questions from 332d8 – 334b4 (his questions about the doctor, the farmer, the shoemaker, etc.)? That is, what has this new line of questioning to do with what’s come before it, and what’s the significance of the argument’s conclusion? How are we to take the bit about the just person being a kind of thief? Is this sarcasm? Is this in any way contributing to the argument just made (332d8-334b4)? Or what? Explain.

- (iv) Socrates and Polemarchus furthermore conclude at 335e3 that ‘it is never just to harm anyone,’ thereby fully refuting Polemarchus’ definition of justice. This argument is begun at 335b2. How does this argument go? What role is played in it by Socrates’ mention of dogs, horses, heat and dryness? Is the argument any good, or not? Why, or why not? If this portion of Socrates’ argument with Polemarchus is only about harming people, what was the previous set of arguments with Polemarchus designed to accomplish?—and why does Socrates’ argument include these two segments?

Thrasy amphacus defines justice as nothing other than the advantage of the stronger (338c1-2). A consequence of this position, according to Thrasy amphacus, is that whatever laws the ruler (i.e., the stronger) makes must be obeyed by the ruler’s subjects, so that, justice is obeying all the ruler’s laws.

QT.

- (i) Socrates concludes at 339e1, ff., that, at least sometimes, it must be just for the subjects to do whatever is disadvantageous to the rulers, which, if true, refutes Thrasy amphacus’ definition. How does Socrates’ argument for this conclusion go? As a result of the argument Thrasy amphacus clarifies his position (340d1-341a4). How does what Thrasy amphacus says here address Socrates’ argument, if at all? Are you convinced, or not, that Thrasy amphacus’ reply is successful? Explain. (You will also benefit from examining Socrates’ speech at 340c1-c3.)

- (ii) In spite of Thrasy amphacus’ reply (one with which Socrates evidently agrees, by the way!), Socrates is still able to refute his account of justice (341c3-342e8) that, justice is doing the advantage of the subjects, not the advantage of the ruler! Explain how this big argument goes, and say whether or not you find the argument convincing and why or why not. According to Socrates’ argument, what seems to be the primary aim of all the sciences? Do you think that Socrates is right to make this presumption, or not? Explain.

- (iii) Thrasy amphacus’ rebuttal (343b1-344c9) compares ruling to shepherding. How is this analogy supposed to work to counter Socrates’ previous argument against him—after all, doesn’t it seem to simply miss the point of that previous argument? Instead, what point must Thrasy amphacus be making with the shepherd illustration in order for it to not be a non-sequitur? How does Socrates address Thrasy amphacus’ rebuttal?—that is, according to Socrates, what confusion has Thrasy amphacus made? Do you think Socrates’ reply here is any good or not? Explain. What implications does Socrates’ reply have for the activity of generating monetary profit?

Undaunted, Thrasy amphacus continues to maintain that the life of the unjust person is better than (more profitable than) the life of the just one. Socrates’ argument against this position (beginning at 349a9) consumes the remainder of the dialogue, and is called the ‘Outdoing Argument’. Before proceeding to state my questions about it, two notes are necessary.

   1. Most translations aren’t clear about the main idea behind ‘outdoing’. The relevant Greek verb
for ‘outdo’ is *pleonektein* [πλεονεκτείν]. The point behind the verb is that one does better than someone else in some activity or field (so that, say, if I *pleonektein* you in music, then I play more beautifully than you do). Now, notice that it may seem as though there is more than one way to *pleonektein* someone else.

- The first is by way of being an expert in something. If you are an expert musician and I am not, you *pleonektein* me in music because you simply know how to play beautifully and I do not.
- The other apparent way to *pleonektein* someone else does not require that the *pleonektikos* possess an expertise. In this case, I, who have no musical expertise, *pleonektein* you (who either are, or are not, expert) in playing beautifully by putting your violin strings out of tune when you’re not looking. I do better than you musically at your expense.

2. The passage just preceding 349a9 explains that Socrates and Thrasymachus will now be using the terms ‘just’ and ‘unjust’ and their cognates from a point of view that is different from what that with which they started. Now, justice and injustice are being looked at from the point of view of the tyrant’s oppressed subjects. From their point of view the tyrant is a consummately unjust person (though Thrasymachus has maintained that the tyrant is the truly just person—the one who deserves more than others, his subjects, who, if they are just must follow the laws he has decreed). Thus, Thrasymachus treats the just person as a sort of simpleton compared with the unjust person. But he is not changing his position on anything. He and Socrates are simply looking at Thrasymachus’ (truly) just person from the point of view of the tyrant’s subjects.

On, then, to the questions about the Outdoing Argument.

- (iv) Explain how the Outdoing Argument goes (349a9-354a6). This is a large argument, and I suggest that you break it into more easily manageable parts. I suggest the following breakdown: Part 1, (349a9-350c8); Part 2, (351a1-352a7); Part 3 (352d1-354a6).
- (v) Is the Outdoing Argument any good or not? Why, or why not?
- (vi) According to the dialogue, what *is* justice? What’s your evidence for saying so? (Be sure to account for 354a8-c3, regardless of how you answer the question.)