

said, me away.

POLUS. Very well; you say that oratory is pandering?  
 SOCRATES. I said that it was a branch of pandering.  
 Your memory is very bad for someone so young,  
 Polus. What will happen to you by and by?  
 POLUS. And do you think that good orators are meanly  
 thought of in a state, and regarded as panders?<sup>1</sup>  
 SOCRATES. Is this a question or the beginning of a  
 speech?  
 POLUS. A question.  
 SOCRATES. In my opinion they are not thought of  
 at all.  
 POLUS. Not thought of? Have they not very great  
 power in a state?  
 SOCRATES. If by power you mean something that is  
 a benefit to its possessor, no.  
 POLUS. That is what I do mean.  
 SOCRATES. Then in that case I consider orators the  
 least powerful people in a state.  
 POLUS. But can they not kill whoever they please,

1. Polus, instead of grappling with the theory of the nature of oratory put forward by Socrates, characteristically appeals to the esteem in which orators are popularly held. A transition is thus effected to a discussion of the real meaning of power, which leads in turn to the main thesis of the dialogue that 'it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong'.

like dictators, and inflict confiscation and banishment on anyone they choose?  
 SOCRATES. I swear, Polus, whenever you open your mouth I'm in doubt whether you are expressing your own opinion or asking me a question.  
 POLUS. I'm asking you a question.  
 SOCRATES. In that case you are asking me two questions at once, my friend.  
 POLUS. Two questions? What do you mean?  
 SOCRATES. Didn't you say just now that orators, like dictators, can kill whoever they please and inflict confiscation and banishment on anyone they choose?

POLUS. Yes.  
 SOCRATES. Well, I maintain that there are two questions here, and I will answer them both. In my view, Polus, as I have already said, orators and dictators are the least powerful persons in a state. They do practically nothing that they will, only what they think best.  
 POLUS. Well, isn't that to enjoy great power?  
 SOCRATES. According to Polus, no.  
 POLUS. According to me? But I say it is.  
 SOCRATES. Oh dear no, you don't. You said that great power was a benefit to its possessor.  
 POLUS. So it is.  
 SOCRATES. Well, do you think it a benefit when a man devoid of wisdom does what seems best to him? Do you call that great power?  
 POLUS. No.

SOCRATES. Then you must prove me wrong, and show that orators are men of wisdom, and oratory an art and not mere pandering. Otherwise orators who do what they please in a state, and dictators too, for that matter, will have nothing to congratulate themselves upon, since according to you power is a blessing, but doing what one pleases without



wisdom is by your own admission a curse. You did admit that, didn't you?

POLUS. Yes.

SOCRATES. Then unless Polus can show Socrates that he was wrong and prove that orators and dictators do what they really will, how can they be said to enjoy great power in a state?

POLUS. This fellow —

SOCRATES. Says that they don't do what they really will. Prove me wrong.

POLUS. Didn't you admit just now that they do what seems best to them?

SOCRATES. Certainly; I don't retract it.

POLUS. Then don't they do what they will?

SOCRATES. No.

POLUS. Although they do what they please?

SOCRATES. Yes.

POLUS. What you say is monstrous and outrageous, Socrates.

SOCRATES. Don't use hard words, my peerless Polus, if I may address you for once in your own alliterative style. Prove my mistake by your questions, if you still have any to ask, or else let us change parts, and you do the answering.

POLUS. Very well, I don't mind answering, in order to get at your meaning.

SOCRATES. Do you think that when men act they will their act itself or the object of their act? Take, for example, patients who drink medicine by doctor's orders. Do you think that they will the act of drinking the medicine with its attendant disagreeableness or the object of the act, that is, health?

POLUS. Health, obviously.

SOCRATES. Similarly, men who trade abroad or engage in business do not will what they are doing at the time; who would will the risk of a voyage and the troubles of business? What they will, I imagine, is

the object of their voyage, to make a fortune; it is wealth that they sail abroad for.

POLUS. Certainly.

SOCRATES. And is not the same universally true?

When a man performs an act as a means to an end, he wills not his act, but the object of his act.

POLUS. Yes.

SOCRATES. Now is there anything which is not either good or bad or intermediate and neutral?

POLUS. Everything must necessarily fall into one or other of these categories, Socrates.

SOCRATES. Would you call wisdom and health and riches and the like good, and their opposites bad?

POLUS. Certainly.

SOCRATES. And would you place in the intermediate class such things as the following, which partake sometimes of the nature of good, sometimes of bad, and sometimes of neither; I mean, for example, sitting and walking and running and sailing, or, to take things of a different type, wood and stone and the like? Are these what you mean when you say that some things are neither good nor bad? 468

POLUS. Precisely.

SOCRATES. Now do men perform these neutral acts as a means to the good, or *vice versa*?

POLUS. The former, obviously.

SOCRATES. Then when we walk we walk as a means to the good, because we think it the better course; and when we stand still on the other hand we stand still from the same motive as a means to the good. Do you agree?

POLUS. Yes.

SOCRATES. And when we kill or banish or confiscate, if we ever do so, we act from a belief that it is better for us to do so than not?

POLUS. Certainly.



SOCRATES. Then men do all these things as a means to the good?

POLUS. Yes.

SOCRATES. We agreed, didn't we, that we do not will acts that are means, but the ends to which they are means?

POLUS. Of course.

SOCRATES. So we do not will a man's death or banishment or loss of property simply for its own sake; we will it if it brings advantage, but not if it brings the reverse. As you say yourself, we will what is good; we do not will what is indifferent, still less what is bad. Am I right, Polus, or not? Why don't you answer?

POLUS. You are right.

SOCRATES. Then, if that is granted, when a dictator or an orator kills or banishes or confiscates because he believes it to be to his advantage, and it turns out to be to his disadvantage, we must allow that he does what he pleases, mustn't we?

POLUS. Yes.

SOCRATES. But does he do what he wills, when what he does turns out to be bad? Why don't you answer?

POLUS. I agree that he doesn't do what he wills.

SOCRATES. How can one say then that such a man has great power in the state, when by your own admission great power is an advantage to its possessor?

POLUS. One can't.

SOCRATES. So it appears that I was right when I said that a man may do what he pleases in a state without either having great power or doing what he wills?

POLUS. To listen to you, Socrates, one might think that you wouldn't be glad to have the opportunity of doing what you please in the state rather than not, and that you don't envy a man who can kill or confiscate or imprison at will.

SOCRATES. Justly or unjustly, do you mean?

POLUS. It makes no difference; he's enviable in either case, isn't he?

SOCRATES. Take care what you are saying, Polus.

POLUS. Why?

SOCRATES. Because it's wrong to speak like this of men who are unenviable and miserable; they are rather to be pitied.

POLUS. Do you really believe that about the people I am speaking of?

SOCRATES. Of course.

POLUS. You think that a man who kills whom he pleases, and is right to do so, is miserable and pitiable?

SOCRATES. No, but I don't call him enviable.

POLUS. A moment ago you called him miserable, didn't you?

SOCRATES. I meant the man who kills wrongfully, my friend. Him I call pitiable as well as miserable. But I don't envy the man who kills with right on his side.

POLUS. A man who is put to death wrongfully is pitiable and miserable, I suppose.

SOCRATES. Less so than the man who kills him, Polus, or the man who is put to death because he deserves it.

POLUS. How so, Socrates?

SOCRATES. Because the greatest of all misfortunes is to do wrong.