Socrates on Rulers and Subjects

This paper is concerned primarily with nine Stephanus pages (338d-347d) of Book One of the Republic, where Socrates and Thrasymachus debate the nature of the relation between rulers and subjects. I shall argue (i) that the position defended by Thrasymachus is vulnerable to an objection raised by Socrates; and (ii) that Socrates’ account of the ruler-subject relation is preferable, provided it is interpreted in the light of doctrines which he expounds later in the dialogue.

The starting-point in Thrasymachus’s account of the relation between rulers and subjects is his definition of justice as the advantage of the stronger. When asked to explain this, he does so not as his audience might expect, in terms of dealings between individuals, but in political terms. He claims that the system of distribution of goods is always biased in favour of the interests of a section of the community: namely, that section which controls the strings of political power, and thereby the distribution of advantages.

Some cities are ruled tyrannically, some democratically and others aristocratically... In each city, the ruling power (to archon) is master... And each ruling power sets up laws for its own advantage; a democracy democratical laws, a tyranny tyrannical ones, and so on. And by so legislating they [the rulers] proclaim that what is their own advantage is just for the subjects, and him who departs from this they punish as a lawbreaker and unjust... In every city the same thing is just, the advantage of the established ruling power. This surely is master; so if one reasons rightly it follows that the just is
everywhere the same, the advantage of the stronger. (338e-339a)

Questioned by Socrates, Thrasymachus says (i) it is just for subjects to obey their rulers. Yet he admits that (ii) rulers sometimes make mistakes in legislating, even mistaking what is advantageous for themselves (339c); from which it follows that (iii) it is sometimes just to do what is disadvantageous for the rulers—which contradicts Thrasymachus’s thesis that the just is nothing other than the advantage of the rulers.

Thrasymachus replies to this objection in a short discourse (340d-341a) which is both eloquent and subtle. He admits that in ordinary speech we say, loosely, that a ruler may mistake his own interest. Similarly with other kinds of craft or expertise: we speak of the doctor making a mistake, or the calculator, or the teacher. Thrasymachus himself had spoken in this way about the ruler at 339c in reply to Socrates’ question. But speaking strictly, no one who really possesses the ability imputed to him by the description ‘doctor’ or ‘calculator’ or ‘ruler’ can be said to commit a mistake in the exercise of that ability.

The one who makes mistakes makes them on account of a failure in knowledge and is in that respect no craftsman... The most precise statement is that the ruler, in so far as he is a ruler, does not err, and unerringly he sets down what is best for himself. (340e-341a)

Most commentators dismiss Thrasymachus’s argument here as a ‘quibble’\(^1\) or a ‘counterintuitive... verbal move’\(^2\) which is inconsistent with the political ‘realism’ he displayed earlier, and which plays into Socrates’ hands. Julia Annas says:

[Thrasymachus] is thinking of the obviously true point that the man who has the upper hand cannot afford to make

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\(^1\) R. C. Cross and A. D. Woozley *Plato’s Republic* (London 1964) 47.

mistakes, or he will soon cease to have the upper hand. He saves the consistency of his position by a verbal move that makes this true of all rulers and all practitioners of any skill. But this flouts our beliefs about doctors, rulers etc., and it is clear that he has essentially given up the idea that the stronger can be equated with the ruler.¹

Annas and the others misunderstand and underestimate Thrasymachus’s argument. As I see it, he remains fully committed to the equation of the ruler with the stronger. Thrasymachus’s position is not that the man who has the upper hand cannot afford to make mistakes, but that the man who really and in truth has the upper hand is, by definition, one who makes no mistake about enacting what will best serve his own interests.

I take Thrasymachus’s position to depend on a point which is both valid in itself and later endorsed by Socrates, that every art or craft or kind of knowledge is defined in terms of successful practice. The craftsman or expert is, first and foremost, one who is equipped to do the work proper to his field of expertise. What makes someone a doctor is the power of healing the sick, and nothing else. It is in virtue of having that power that he is a doctor. The better he is at healing the sick, the better his claim to be called a doctor. In ordinary discourse, admittedly, we sometimes use looser criteria for identifying medical experts. We refer to their office, status and title, or the equipment and accoutrements of their office. We may call someone a doctor simply because he advertises himself as a doctor, displays a degree certificate in the room he calls his surgery, wears a white coat and carries a stethoscope, and so on. We may call someone a sea-captain simply because he occupies the position of a sea-captain, wears a captain’s uniform and is treated as captain by the crew of his ship. We may call someone a ruler simply because he has the position and title of ruler, holds a sceptre and sits on a throne, is dressed in a purple cloak and a golden crown, and hands out commands which are obeyed by all and sundry. But all such criteria are loose and inaccurate, because they refer to the appearance

¹ Annas, 43.
of competence, not the reality. The one essential criterion of any sort of competence is this: can the person really do the work? If he cannot, then it is inappropriate to designate him by a term which, understood strictly, implies that he can. A ruler is one who really possesses the expertise and personal qualities needed to do the work of ruling effectively. A so-called ruler whose attempts at government were a series of blunders, miscalculations, gaffes and cock-ups would be a ruler only in name and not in fact, whatever his official title and position. Every master of a craft or technique who really is exactly that, and to the extent that he is exactly that, makes no mistake in the exercise of his knowledge.

By this strict criterion, instances of genuine competence will be hard to find. Indeed, no one is capable of satisfying the criterion in all circumstances. Every human craftsman or possessor of knowledge is liable to fail occasionally. No craftsman is a pure embodiment of knowledge and nothing else. Anyone who possesses medical expertise, for example, is a fallible human being, whose command of the expertise is conditioned by circumstances, not so absolute that he can exercise it effortlessly whenever he chooses. If the doctor is dog-tired, or insufficiently informed about the symptoms of the patient, or ignorant of other relevant facts, he may misdiagnose and misprescribe for the patient’s ailments. But it doesn’t follow that medicine should be defined as the art of mistreating the sick. As Thrasymachus points out (340d2-5), we don’t take the doctor’s failure to heal the patient as evidence of medical competence; he isn’t called a doctor because of his mistake. In so far as he is a doctor, he is a healer. The failure of the doctor’s attempt to exercise or apply his knowledge is necessarily a manifestation of some kind of ignorance or weakness on his part. When error of any sort is attributed to someone he is thereby classified as one whose knowledge is limited and imperfect, or for some reason or in some way not totally at his command. This doesn’t mean that the doctor who fails on a particular occasion necessarily, at that moment, ceases to possess genuine medical knowledge; only that he has failed to use it. The power to heal really was in him and remains in him, we may suppose, though something prevented him from exercising it on the occasion of the
mistake. Similarly with the ruler. Anyone who occupies a position of political power will be liable to commit occasional errors in devising legislation and public policies; but in so far as he really is a ruler, he really does possess the competence, power and strength proper to a ruler, and his acts and enactments will show this.

Socrates accepts the point that the ruler, in so far as he is a ruler, must be capable of doing the work of ruling. But he challenges Thrasymachus's assumption that the art of ruling is essentially exploitative; that the work of ruling, strictly and properly specified, consists in enacting laws and giving orders of such a sort and in such a way as to promote the ruler's interests at the expense of his subjects' interests. The doctor qua doctor is one who cares for the sick, not a profiteer or businessman (chrematistes, 341c5); and the sea-captain is one whose job is to govern, co-ordinate and if necessary correct the work of the sailors who are subject to him. By analogy, the job of the ruler qua ruler must be to direct and care for the welfare of his subjects, not himself.

Socrates simplifies the cumbersome phrases of Thrasymachus: 'the doctor in so far as he is what his name implies', 'the ruler in so far as he is a ruler'. Socrates talks simply of the art of medicine, the art of ruling. This is legitimate and acceptable to Thrasymachus, given that an individual is a doctor or ruler in virtue of possessing the relevant expertise. The question what it is to be a ruler is simply the question what the ability to rule consists in. Socrates now develops this point. Every art or skill or expertise, including the art of ruling, exists for the sake of, and is defined in terms of, its own proper end or object. The end in each case is to provide for the needs of some subject external to the art itself. Art is a kind of knowledge (episteme, 342c11), and does not aim at satisfying its own needs or remedying its own deficiencies; for in so far as it really is knowledge it has no needs or deficiencies. Knowledge as such is faultless. No authentic kind of knowledge needs to be corrected, either by itself or by any other kind of knowledge. The proper end

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4 Aristotle's account of akrasia (Nicomachean Ethics VII) might be adapted to support this suggestion.
of art or knowledge is the correcting of defects in some subject other than the art itself. The art of medicine, for example, is used not to correct and improve itself but to correct disorders and weaknesses and restore health in human bodies. Socrates uses a political metaphor to describe the relation of the various arts—all of them, not only the art of ruling—to the subjects on which they are exercised:

The arts rule and are stronger than that of which they are arts. (342c8-9)
No kind of knowledge prescribes or seeks the advantage of the stronger, but rather that of the weaker which is ruled by it. (342c11-d1)
There isn’t anyone in any kind of rulership who, in so far as he is ruler, prescribes or seeks his own advantage rather than that of what is ruled and for which he practises his craft; and he looks to this [subject] and what is advantageous and suitable for it in saying everything he says and doing everything he does. (342e6-11)

The proposition that no art seeks to improve or correct itself does not entail that an art cannot be used to improve or correct some condition of its practitioner. Obviously one and the same person may be both the master of an art and the subject on whom the art is practised. A doctor may treat his own ailments, a barber may shave his own beard, and a legislator may enact laws which protect his interests as well as those of other citizens. But to apply an art to oneself, for one’s own advantage, is to treat oneself as a subject or patient of the art, not to treat the art as a subject of itself.

There seem to be three questions at issue between Thrasymachus and Socrates:
(i) Does the work of ruling necessarily benefit the ruler himself? (Thrasymachus says yes, Socrates no.)
(ii) Does the work of ruling necessarily disadvantage the subject? (Thrasymachus says yes, Socrates no).
(iii) Does the work of ruling necessarily benefit the subject? (Thrasymachus says no, Socrates yes).
The weakest point in Thrasymachus's position is his claim that the work of ruling necessarily disadvantages the subject, and in his reply to Socrates he moves hastily to qualify this dubious claim. But there are difficulties also in his complementary thesis, that the work of ruling necessarily benefits, first and foremost, the ruler himself. Both Thrasymachus and Socrates assume that the ruler is the person or group of persons by whose expertise and authority the functions of government are administered. Thrasymachus, but not Socrates, wishes to add that the beneficiary of all political activity must be the ruler himself. But then Socrates' original question arises once again: if the person or group which wields political expertise happens not to benefit from doing so, who then is the true ruler? Suppose, for example, that an individual who bears the constitutional status and power of an absolute monarch chooses to enact laws and single-handedly administer policies which are not designed to benefit himself but to improve the lot of his poorest subjects. Thrasymachus will say this benevolent autocrat is foolish and no true ruler, since he derives no advantage for himself from his labours. But if the question who is ruler depends on who benefits from the work of government, rather than on who does the work, Thrasymachus must say the real rulers of this city are the common people, and the city is to be classified as a democracy—despite the fact that the constitution is despotic and the citizens do not participate in government; which is counter-intuitive. If on the other hand the ruler is necessarily the one who wields political expertise, as well as the one who benefits from it, then Thrasymachus has to say the city has no real ruler at all, in the strict sense of the word; which again is counter-intuitive if, as we are supposing, every civic activity is controlled by the titular ruler and directed skilfully by him to a definite political end.

Nevertheless, Thrasymachus isn't convinced by Socrates' argument that every art, including ruling, is directed to the interest of the subject. He returns to the attack with a brilliant speech (343b-344c) in which he defends his equation of the ruling art with large-scale exploitation, and expands the scope of his theory of justice to embrace not only the relations between political rulers and their subjects but all the relations between individual members of society. He qualifies his earlier insinuation that if the ruler is really
doing his job, the people must be suffering. He concedes that the
ruler may have to make some attempt at serving the welfare of his
people, to serve his own interest; but this, he says, is analogous to
the shepherd who cares for his sheep, feeds them and fattens them,
only because in due course he or his master is going to fleece them,
sell them or kill and eat them. Justice and the just are really
‘another’s good’, the advantage of the ruler and stronger, and the
disadvantage of the subject who obeys and serves. To be just is
always to be a loser, not only in relation to one’s political masters,
but in relation to anyone at all who is the recipient and beneficiary
of one’s just conduct. If I owe you ten dollars, and I submit to your
demand to pay the debt as justice requires, then I am a loser to the
amount of ten dollars, and the advantage is yours. If a just man
holds some archonship or other civic office, his own business will
go to ruin through neglect, and he will take no compensating
benefit from state property, precisely because he is just. The unjust
man, by contrast, will make sure he profits in every way from his
tenure of public office. We see this most clearly, Thrasymachus
says, in the case of the supremely successful practitioner of
injustice, the great tyrant, who exploits and enslaves his subjects,
and turns everything they do to his own advantage.

Thrasymachus’s use of the ruler-shepherd analogy would
surprise his audience within the dialogue, who might recall that in
Book II of the Iliad the phrase ‘shepherd of the people’ is used of
three different rulers—Nestor (85), Atreus (105) and Agamemnon
(243)—without any implication that they were profiteers who
exploited and despoiled their own subjects. The metaphor is used
again in the same non-derogatory way by Aeschylus, Sophocles
and Euripides. But most modern commentators react
sympathetically to Thrasymachus’s inversion of the traditional
pastoral metaphor. They take Thrasymachus’s self-interested
shepherd as a decisive counter-example to the Socratic thesis that
the proper end of every art is the correcting of defects and
weaknesses in some subject other than the art itself. George
Kerferd says:
Thrasymachus answers [the Socratic thesis] completely not in abstract terms, but much more effectively, with a single convincing example.\footnote{G.B. Kerferd, 'The doctrine of Thrasymachus in Plato's Republic', Durham University Journal n.s. 9 (1947) 22.}

And C. D. C. Reeve offers an argument in support of Thrasymachus's account of the shepherd's art:

A Shepherd is not someone who 'provides what is best for the object of [his Craft's] care' (345d1-3). That description does not capture his essence. Rather he is someone who puts or keeps sheep in a condition that makes them best serve some interest of ours. Consequently, it does seem that the Shepherd aims at what is advantageous to himself (or his master), and not—except perhaps incidentally—at what is advantageous to his sheep.\footnote{C.D.C. Reeve Philosopher-Kings (Princeton 1988) 280-81.}

But there is a logical flaw in Reeve's argument. He moves from the proposition that the shepherd's job is to keep sheep in a condition that makes them best serve some interest of ours (where 'ours', I take it, refers to the interests of human beings generally) to the proposition that the shepherd's job is to keep sheep in a condition that makes them best serve some interest of his (the shepherd himself, one human being in particular). Socrates accepts the first proposition, but denies the second.

Doesn't each of them [the arts] provide us \textit{(hemin)} with some specific benefit? (346a6-7)

'Us' here refers not to the practitioner of the art as such, but to all of us human beings, whose common needs the art is designed to supply or whose common deficiencies it is designed to rectify. The art of shepherding isn't designed essentially to serve the interests of its practitioner, or of any other specific individual. Thrasymachus gives the game away when he admits that the shepherd's work may
serve the interest of his master as well as himself (343b3-4). In the same remote and indirect way, the shepherd’s work may serve the interest of the shepherd’s family, or of anyone who needs food and clothing. But for all that, the shepherd’s work in itself, apart from its consequences, consists simply in tending his flock.

The point is confirmed by reflecting on the function of a shepherd’s dog. Socrates observes in Book Three that the shepherd trains his dog to be an auxiliary (epikouros, 416a4) in the work of tending the flock. A good sheep-dog doesn’t pursue its own selfish appetites; it doesn’t molest or prey upon the sheep, like a wolf. The well-trained dog is like the military class in a well-ordered city, gentle with its charges and hostile only to enemies (375e).

Socrates does not mean that tending sheep is essentially an amateur pastime or hobby. Anyone who works as a shepherd will hope and expect to derive some advantage for himself from doing his job. Indeed, Socrates affirms explicitly what Thrasymachus had only hinted at, that no one would willingly practise any craft—medicine, shepherding, ruling or anything else—if no payment or advantage for himself were attached to doing the work (346de). But though a doctor practises his art, usually or always, as a means of making money, the doctor qua practitioner of the art of medicine is a healer of the sick, not a money-maker. Practising medicine is one thing, doing well out of it financially is another. Each distinct art is defined in terms of the specific benefit with which it alone supplies us. Any art, not only medicine, may be practised as a means of making money; and a benefit which every art is a potential means of obtaining—a common benefit, Socrates calls it (346a7)—cannot be the specific, distinctive benefit of any art. Medicine may be practised as a means of making money, and so may cobbling; yet there is a distinction between medicine and cobbling, so neither art can be defined in terms of making money. Socrates concludes that if doctors and cobblers succeed in making money, they do so by exercising an additional, supplementary expertise: the art of wage-earning (misthotike techne, 346c10).

This might seem a bit contrived. Why should the craftsman be supposed to need a special kind of knowledge, over and above the
knowledge exercised in doing his job, to obtain the wages earned by doing his job? Perhaps what Socrates has in mind is that commercial success, as distinct from artistic or technical success, requires specialized skills of an appropriate sort. In contemporary jargon, the craftsman must know how to 'market' himself and his products if he is to do well financially. He must be a good businessman. Competence in his own particular craft is not automatically accompanied by mercantile skills. A medical practitioner may be good at healing the sick but poor at making money. Conversely, he may be a clumsy and incompetent surgeon, but persuasive and unscrupulous about getting his patients to undergo expensive operations which they do not need.

Apply this principle to Thrasymachus's shepherd, who cares for, feeds and protects his sheep only because he has an ulterior motive: namely, that he intends some day to butcher the animals and wants the meat to be palatable, or wants to sell the sheep for the highest possible price. Socrates admits that the shepherd may indeed have such a motive for doing his work, but the motive doesn't constitute the ability to do the work. He reminds Thrasymachus that we are discussing the work of the shepherd qua shepherd, the craftsman whose work manifests precisely the knowledge of shepherding, not of gastronomy, salesmanship or profiteering (345c4-d1). These are all distinct kinds of knowledge. A person might want to make money, and be good at making money, without being a qualified shepherd; conversely, a person might be an excellent shepherd though he dislikes the taste of mutton and has no commercial skills whatever.

Similarly with those who practise the art of ruling. Even if every single one of them is interested in accumulating wealth, such an enterprise constitutes no part of the work of ruling, strictly and properly specified. Socrates admits that public officials, like everyone else, have material needs and desires, and hope and expect to receive some reward for doing their work. But as we have seen, getting paid for doing a job is not what constitutes doing the job; it is a result or consequence of doing the job. Conceivably, a person might do the job of ruling conscientiously and effectively without receiving any reward at all for his pains, like the just
archon described by Thrasymachus himself in his second speech (343e). If it were true by definition that the work of ruling benefits the person who does it, as Thrasymachus supposes, there would be no reason even for a selfish tyrant to ask for anything more than to do the work of ruling, free of charge to the public purse. In fact, the real work of ruling—the useful and important work carried out day after day by legislators, magistrates, court officials and other public administrators—is in itself a unrewarding and laborious business, which no one would willingly undertake without recompense. Who would want to involve himself in straightening out other people's problems, Socrates asks (346e8-9), if he were not to be paid for doing it?

I think Socrates has established his negative thesis, that the work of ruling does not consist essentially in providing benefits for the ruler. But what about his positive thesis, that the work of ruling consists in providing benefits for the subject? Prima facie, this is much less plausible. It appears that Socrates is guilty of a mistake precisely opposite to but parallel with the mistake committed by Thrasymachus. Thrasymachus wants to define the art of ruling in terms of the advantage of those who practise the art, and Socrates refutes this; but then, it appears, Socrates tries to define the art of ruling in terms of the interests of those who are the subjects of the art, which is equally mistaken. I myself once stated the objection as follows:

The art of ruling cannot be defined in Thrasymachus's way, as the art of feathering one's own nest. But neither can it be defined in Socrates' way, as the art of feathering other people's nests. Ruling consists in ordering, governing and controlling a community, but for all Socrates has yet shown, achievement of this may as it happens serve only the interest of the ruler.

I am now inclined to defend Socrates against this objection.

The thesis that the art of ruling provides benefits for the subject is ambiguous. Part of the difficulty in interpreting it arises from the nature of the elenctic method of argument, the aim of which is to refute the opponent by getting him to agree to propositions which entail the polar opposite of the thesis he wishes to defend. Therefore we find Socrates appearing to draw conclusions which are so formulated that they lend themselves most readily to an interpretation which is the direct antithesis of Thrasymachus's position, but which can also be interpreted in a way which is more consonant with Socrates' premises and more plausible in itself, though maybe less directly antithetical to his opponent's position.

Thus when Socrates says, in contradiction to Thrasymachus, that the shepherd as such is concerned only with what is advantageous for the sheep (345c4-5, d1-3), it is natural to interpret him as saying that the shepherd's job, properly understood, is to make pets of the sheep, pampering them and fussing over them all their lives till they die, at an advanced age, of natural causes. But this takes no account of Socrates' remark that every art is designed to provide us - scilicet, human beings—with some specific benefit (346a6-7). He develops this idea further in Book Two, arguing that all the arts practised in the city originate from and are designed to serve the many and various needs of human beings (369b ff.). The art of shepherding, therefore, as Socrates understands it, is concerned only with domestic sheep, not wild sheep; and it is not practised in isolation, as an end in itself: it is properly subordinate on the one hand to the crafts of the slaughterer, the butcher and the cook, and on the other hand to the crafts of the shearer, the carder, the spinner, the dyer and the tailor. Certainly the proper object of shepherding (pace Thrasymachus and his followers) is simply to maintain domestic sheep in good condition; but Socrates would not deny that the criteria of 'good condition' in this case are determined ultimately by reference to the human community's need for meat, wool, tallow and other useful ovine products. If that need did not exist, if sheep were not useful to us, there would be no art of shepherding. So though Socrates' position is different from that of Thrasymachus, it is not diametrically opposed to it.
Similarly, when Thrasymachus says the ruler rules to promote his own advantage, he means that ruling is essentially the art of self-enrichment—‘feathering one’s own nest’; but when Socrates says the ruler considers and commands the advantage of the subject, he doesn’t mean (I now think) that ruling is essentially the art of enriching other people—‘feathering other people’s nests’. Nor does he mean that the ruler qua ruler is a sort of public benefactor or universal philanthropist, the organizer, patron and host of public feasts and entertainments. This may not be obvious from the discussion with Thrasymachus, but it is made clear in Socrates’ reply to an objection at the beginning of Book Four.

Socrates has been describing the frugal life-style of the rulers in a well-ordered city; and Adeimantus objects (419a) that if these rulers do not possess the wealth and privileges enjoyed by rulers in existing cities, they will surely not be happy. In reply, Socrates says he believes his guardians will be happy; but in any case the purpose of government is not to provide a privileged élite with an everlasting picnic. The purpose of founding a just city is not to make any one group in it—guardians or anyone else—supremely happy, but to make the city as a whole happy. And the happiness proper to a city has to be distinguished from the happiness of a group of revellers at a festal assembly. We know well enough how to achieve the latter, Socrates says ironically, by encouraging farmers to dress in fine robes and golden jewellery, and cultivate the land at their pleasure;

and we might have the potters recline from left to right in front of the fire, drinking and feasting, with their wheel beside them to potter with if they felt so inclined; and we might make everyone else blessed in the same way so that the whole city might be happy. But give us no such advice; because if we were to follow it, the farmer will not be a farmer, nor the potter a potter; nor will any of the others keep to the patterns of work that make up the city. (420e3-421a2)

Above all, he says, if we allowed guardians to behave in this self-indulgent fashion the result would be the destruction of the city. The guardians and auxiliaries must be compelled and persuaded to
concentrate on becoming the best possible craftsmen at their proper work, and see to it that everyone else does the same. In this way the city as a whole, and each part of it, will receive the share of happiness appropriate to its nature. Socrates goes on to warn of the damaging effects, on individual craftsmen and the city as a whole, of both poverty and excessive wealth (421d-422a). From this passage it is clear that the ruler’s function, as Socrates sees it, is neither to enrich and entertain himself and his class, nor to enrich and entertain his subjects.

What then does Socrates mean when he says the ruler considers and commands the advantage of the subject? I suggest we replace this question by two more specific questions. Who or what does Socrates take to be the proper subject of the art of ruling? And what is the nature of the benefit or advantage rendered by the art of ruling to its proper subject?

It might seem the answer to the first question is straightforward. The subjects of the art of ruling are surely the people, the individual human beings who are ruled. Socrates never actually says this; but if the doctor seeks the advantage of the sick man who is his patient (342d5), and the sea-captain seeks the advantage of the sailor who is ruled by him (342e3-4), it seems the political ruler must seek the advantage of the man who is his subject. Notice, however, that Socrates refers to the doctor’s subject not simply as a man but as ‘the sick’, and he refers to the sea-captains subject not simply as a man but as a sailor. Both the doctor’s art and the sea-captain’s art consider and deal with people, but in different ways. Each art has a distinctively specified subject as well as a distinctively specified end. The doctor is concerned with people only in so far as they are biological organisms\(^8\) afflicted by disorders which his art can remedy. The sea-captain is concerned with people in so far as they are members of an organized company of nautical technicians, who need and are accustomed and contractually obliged to follow his directions in the complex task of sailing the ship. Similarly with the

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\(^8\) See 342d6, where Socrates calls the doctor a ruler of bodies (*somaton* ... *archon*).
art of ruling. This too deals with human beings, but it considers them not simply as human beings but as citizens, members of an organized civic community, who need and are accustomed and legally obliged to follow the ruler's directions in the complex task of running the community. In other words, the proper subject of the art of ruling is the polis and the polites. The ruler qua ruler is concerned with the subject qua subject.

What then, according to Socrates, is the nature of the benefit or advantage rendered by the art of ruling to its proper subject? The answer is connected with the answer to the first question. The ruler provides his subject, the city and its proper parts, the citizens, with nothing other than good laws and good government. Other benefits—material goods, entertainments etc.—are provided by other craftsmen. Good laws and good government are properly civic or common goods, advantageous to the community as a whole rather than to the ruler himself, or to any other particular individual or social class.

Socrates repeats in Book Seven that the purpose of ruling and legislation is not to provide desirable commodities or special privileges for any particular section of society, either the ruling class or the subject class:

The law is not concerned with the superior happiness of any one class in the city, but it works to produce this in the whole city, harmonizing the citizens by persuasion and compulsion, and making them impart to one another the benefit which each of them is able to contribute to the community; and the law itself produces such men in the city, not in order to leave each free to do whatever he pleases, but so that it may itself use them for the binding together of the city. (519e-520a)

So again we see that though Socrates' account of the relation between ruler and subject is different from that of Thrasymachus, it is not diametrically opposed to it.

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