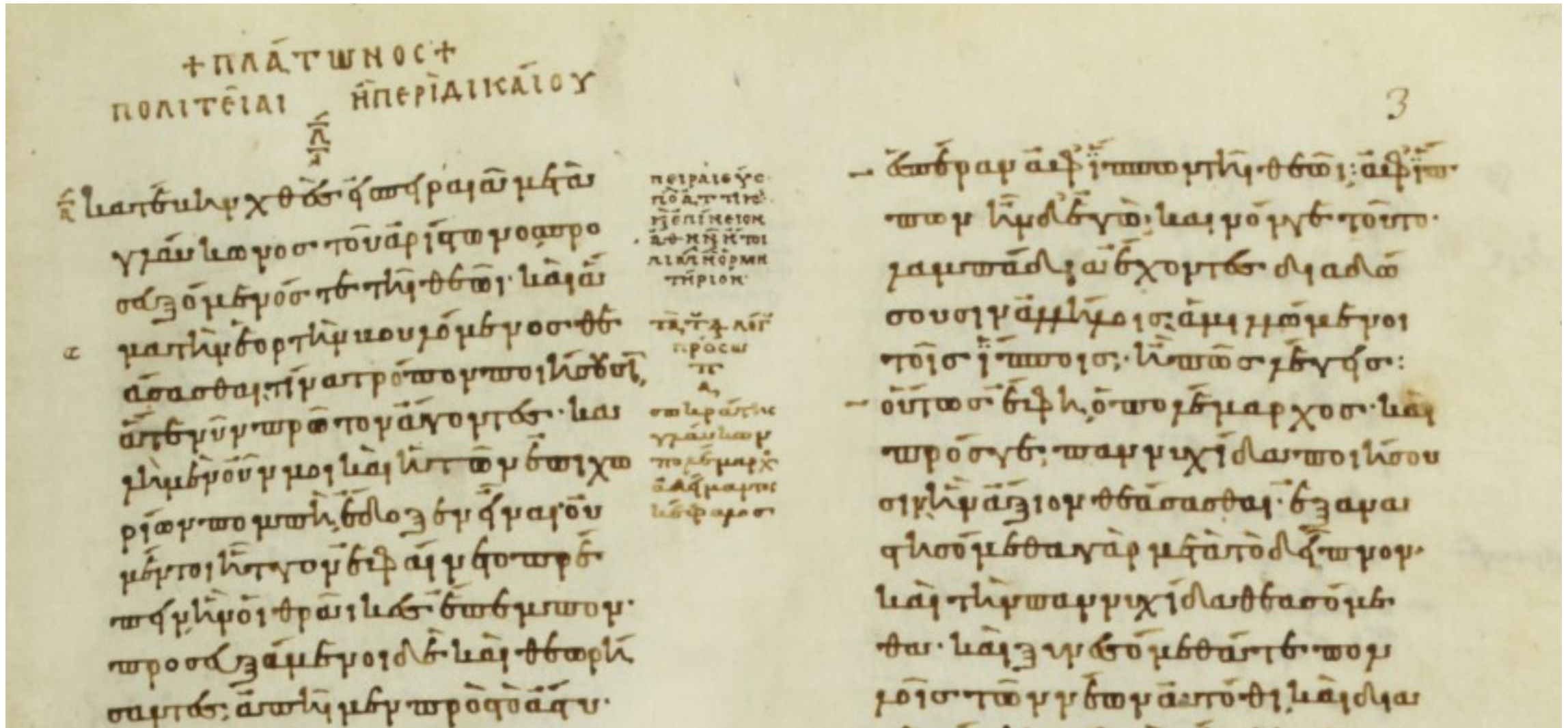# *Republic* Book I: introduction

from Parisinus graecus 1807 folio 3r,
a 9th cent. Byzantine manuscript of Plato's Republic

technē

the concept of *technē*

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  some paradigm examples of *technē* we see in the Republic:
  - *grammatikē* = the *technē* of literacy
  - *iatrikē* = the *technē* of medicine
  - *logistikē* = the *technē* of calculation (i.e. expertise in adding, subtracting, etc.)
  - the *technē* of captaining (i.e. piloting a ship)
  - the *technē* of house-building
  - the *technē* of cobblery
  - the *technē* of horse-breeding

aretē

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    - is usually translated as 'virtue'
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        - ➤ moral excellence in particular
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Q: Does it in fact hold that

for a human being to have virtue *in the moral sense*
=
for a human being to have virtue *in the functional sense*   ????

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Republic Book I:

Introduction and Cephalus
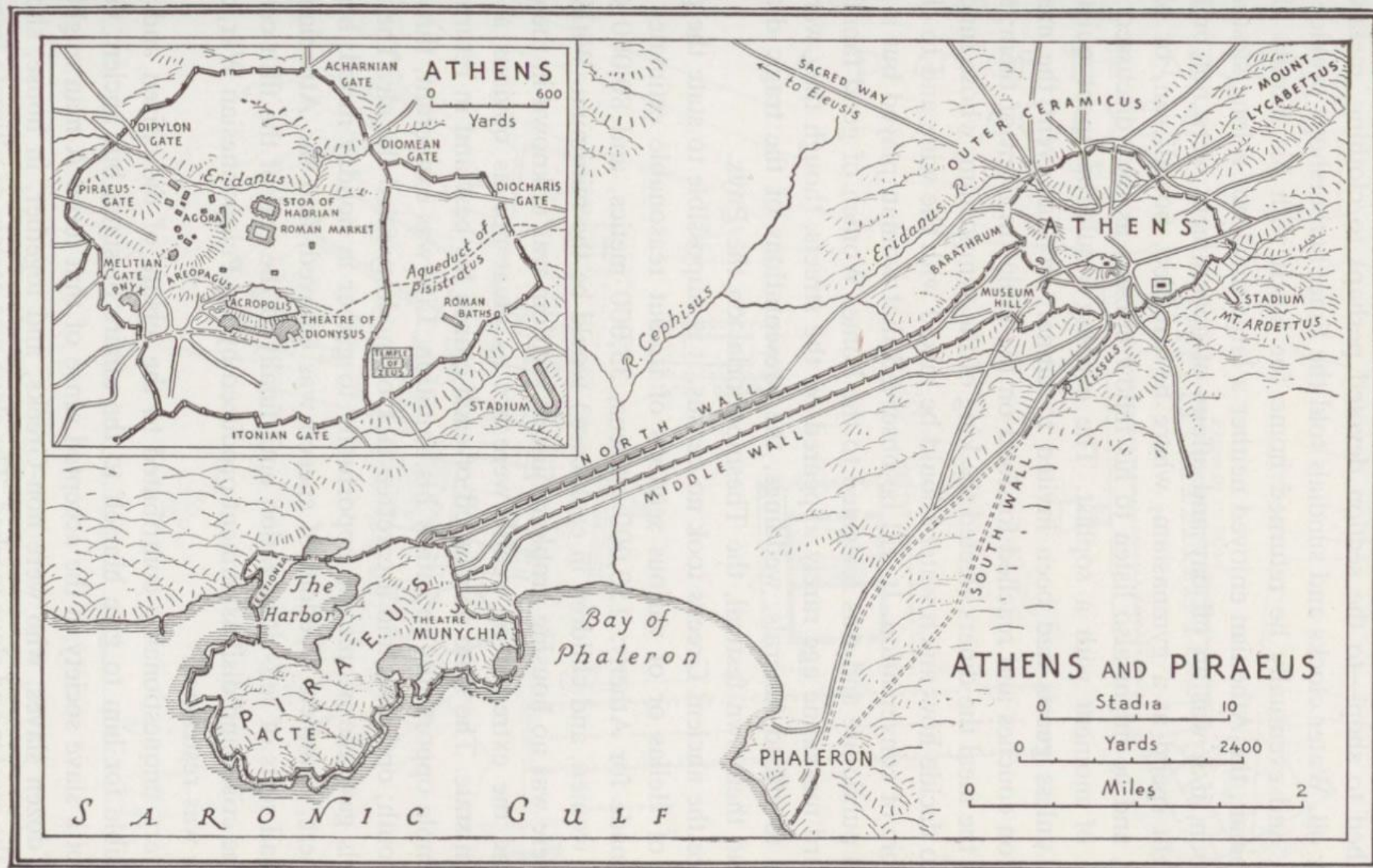
"I went down to the Piraeus yesterday with Glaucon son of Ariston…" (*Republic* I, 327a)

Republic I 328b-c (Socrates speaking)

'Cephalus! I enjoy talking with the very old. For we should ask them—as we might ask those who have travelled a **road** that we too will probably have to follow—What kind of road is it? Is it **rough and difficult** or is it **smooth and easy**?

And I'd gladly find out from you what you think about [getting old]… Is it difficult? What's your report about it?'

Republic I: 329a-d (Cephalus speaking)

'By the god, Socrates, I'll tell you exactly what I think. [...] The majority [of old people] complain about the lost pleasures they remember from their youth: those of sex, drinking parties, feasts, [and so on]... and they get upset [at being old] as if they had been deprived of important things and had **a good life** [*eu zan*] back then but now hardly have any life at all...

But I've met some [old people] who don't feel like that [and neither do I]... For [it seems to me that] old age brings peace and freedom--for when the [body's] appetites relax and stop torturing us... we escape from many insane masters...

The real cause [of suffering for those who complain] isn't old age but **the way they've lived**. If a person is **well-ordered** [*kosmios*] and **has a good character** [*eukolos*], old age will be just moderately onerous; otherwise both old age *and* youth are hard to bear.'

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"I admired him for saying that and I wanted him to tell me more, so I urged him on:

'When you say things like that, Cephalus, I suppose that most people don't agree. *They* think that you bear old age more easily <u>not</u> because of the way you've lived but because you're **wealthy**.'

[...]

'Tell me, [Cephalus,] what's the greatest good you've received from being so very wealthy?'

Republic I 331c-d (Socrates response)

"…speaking of __justice__, the thing itself, are we to say unconditionally that it's **speaking the truth** and **paying back whatever debts one has incurred**? Or is doing these things *sometimes just* and *sometimes unjust*? Or is doing these things *sometimes just* and *sometimes unjust*?

I mean, e.g., this. Everyone would surely agree that if a sane man lends weapons to a friend and then asks for them back when he's out of his mind, the friend shouldn't return them, and wouldn't be acting justly if he did. Nor should anyone be willing to tell the whole truth to [such a friend] who's out of his mind.'

the saying of Simonides and
the Polemarchus definition of justice

the poet Simonides has said (331e):

- 'what's just [*to dikaion*] is to return to each person what he deserves'

Polemarchus thinks this is <u>true</u> and interprets it to mean:

- what's just is to benefit one's friends and harm one's enemies

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- would be an **<u>expert</u>** at discovering which courses action are *just* and successfully performing *just actions*
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- to have the excellence [*aretē*] of justice
                        is
- to have a *technē* concerning how to benefit one's friends and harm one's enemies

Socrates' case (335b-e) to Polemarchus that:

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PREMISE 2   justice is the opposite of injustice

PREMISE 3   harming a human being means making them have less of justice and more of its opposite

CONCLUSION   harming other humans *isn't* part of <u>what it is to be a just human being</u>

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- let **A** = **musicality** and let **B** = **unmusicality**

(i.e. the skills of an excellent musician)   (i.e. the complete lack of any musical skills)

- let **A** = **knowledge of horsemanship** and **B** = **utter ignorance of horsemanship**

(i.e. knowledge of how to ride a horse well)   (i.e. the complete lack of any such knowledge)

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Republic Book I:

Socrates and Thrasymachus

Thrasymachus' definition of justice
(a bold-sounding but perplexing proposal)

according to Thrasymachus:

- what's just [*to dikaion*] is "the advantage of the stronger"

- and this is the definition of justice

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at first Thrasymachus seems to be saying (338d-339)

1. what's just is to obey the <u>laws</u> [*nomoi*] of one's society

2. the laws of one's society were put in place by the ruling classes in order to benefit *them*

3. so what's just is what's to the advantage of the stronger, i.e. the rulers in power

3 theses Thrasymachus initially accepts (338c-339d)

[T1] by definition: what's just is what's advantageous to the stronger, i.e. the rulers in power

[T2] it's just to obey the laws and commands of the rulers in power

[T3] the rulers in power can make mistakes about what is and isn't to their advantage

Republic I (340c-340e)

Soc: 'Tell me Thrasymachus, is this what you wanted to say: that what's just is what the stronger *believes* to be to his advantage? Is this what we are to say you mean?

Thr: 'Not at all. [...] When someone makes an error in the treatment of patients, do you call him a doctor in regard to that very error? Or when someone makes an error in calculating do you call him [someone with the *technē* of] calculating in regard to that very error in calculation? I think we [do say things like this], but according to the precise account... no craftsman [*technitēs*] ever errs. It's when his knowledge fails him that he makes an error.'

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[T1]   by definition: what's just is what's advantageous to the stronger, i.e. the rulers in power

[T1*] by definition: what's just is what's advantageous to one who possesses the *technē* of ruling insofar as that person possesses the *technē* of ruling

[T4]   the *technē* of ruling is a *technē* for benefitting oneself by dominating and exploiting others in political as well as interpersonal contexts

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what Thrasymachus *really* wants to say:

- justice **isn't** a virtue *in the functional sense*
  - ➢ it's the disposition of character that makes a person ripe for being dominated and exploited by others

- it's not <u>the perfectly just person</u> who has some special *technē* by which they lead their life

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- according to Thrasymachus
  - just people
    - inevitably end up being taken advantage of by the ruling classes and/or unjust people
    - can't ever achieve true happiness precisely because they insist on being just

  - a truly happy human life would be
    - the life of an **unjust person** who successfully pursues his/her personal self-interest completely unconstrained by either law or concern for others

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Socrates' final argument to Thrasymachus (352e-354a)

CLAIM:

"one who's just has happiness [*eudaimonia*] and one who's unjust is wretched"

ARGUMENT:

1. The human soul [*psychē*] has a function [*ergon*]: namely, the leading of a human life

2. If X has a function [*ergon*], the virtue [*aretē*] of X is the quality (or pattern of qualities) that enables X perform its function **well**

3. Hence the virtue [*aretē*] of a human soul [*psychē*] is the quality (or pattern of qualities) that enables a human soul to lead a human life *well*

4. But the virtue [*aretē*] of a human soul [*psychē*] is **justice**

5. So the presence of justice in one's soul is what enables a human to live *well*

6. A human life that's lived *well* is exactly what we mean by a **happy** human life

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