

WHAT IS “WRONG”?

A SOCRATIC DIALOGUE

SOCRATES *Oh, what a beautiful Saturday afternoon. The birds are chirping, the sun is shining...*

GLAUCON *And look at those hot little boys.*

SOCRATES *I do love their weekly wrestling practices.*

GLAUCON *Me too... O Socrates, do you think what we are doing is wrong?*

SOCRATES *My dear Glaucon, nothing could be more virtuous than reveling in the pale beauty of nubile boys.*

GLAUCON *No, no, no. I meant, aren't we in the wrong spot? Don't you think we'd have a better view from the other side of the field?*

SOCRATES *Your question intrigues me. But, I must confess, I cannot give you a satisfactory answer, for I do not even know what wrong itself is.*

GLAUCON *Why, O most wise and fragrant Socrates, wrong is that which is at odds in the slightest with any of your brilliant teachings.*

SOCRATES *Oh, you're so sweet. But seriously.*

GLAUCON *Well, if you refuse that definition, let me present a more common view. That is to say, those actions are wrong which give the gods indigestion... and possibly flatulence.*

SOCRATES *Let us examine this further. Have you ever been to that foodstand on the corner of Pericles and 35th?*

GLAUCON *Oh, Adeimantus' food emporium? Right next to the amphitheater?*

SOCRATES *Yeah, that's the one. Have you ever had their lamb and feta cheese gyro?*

GLAUCON *All the time. So conveniently located, too! I*

always sneak one of those gyros into the theater under my toga. You'd have to be Midas to afford the food inside.

SOCRATES *But have you not ever suffered from indigestion after devouring one of those sweet, sweet gyros?*

GLAUCON *Not infrequently.*

SOCRATES *Now, were there not many legendary figures begotten by a god in union with a mortal?*

GLAUCON *Of course there were.*

SOCRATES *So it follows that divine reproductive organs are similar to those of mortals. Obviously, then, their digestive tracts must be similar as well.*

GLAUCON *Indubitably.*

SOCRATES *So clearly, what gives you indigestion will also give the gods indigestion, and will therefore be wrong.*

GLAUCON *It must be so.*

SOCRATES *But is it conceivable that those scrumptious gyros could possibly be wrong?*

GLAUCON *By the gods, no! How ignorant I have been!*

SOCRATES *Glaucon, if ignorance were a virtue, you would be me.*

GLAUCON *If only that were the case. Oh dear me, here comes Thrasy-machus. I still feel so awkward when we run into each other.*

THRASYMACHUS *Hello, Glaucon.*

GLAUCON *Thrasy-machus.*

THRASYMACHUS *I see you've found a new... friend. I just*

FEATURE

came by to ask for my toga. I think it's still at your place.

SOCRATES *Glaucon and I were just discussing the true nature of wrong. Please, join us now in our inquiry.*

THRASYMACHUS *Um, I would really like to, but I just remembered that I have to go...sacrifice, uh, some cattle to, uh, to gods of...pious...godliness. Yeah. Sorry.*

SOCRATES *But really, what is piety?*

THRASYMACHUS *No, I'm sorry. I really have to go.*

SOCRATES *But really, what is go?*

GLAUCON *An intriguing question, Socrates. But let us return to our discussion of wrong.*

THRASYMACHUS *Fine. I'll stay. But can we please get my toga after this?*

SOCRATES *Now Glaucon, why don't you let me do the thinking from now on? Since very few people, most definitely not including you, can directly access the form of the wrong, let me attempt to explain it by analogy. Now, imagine that one of those tantalizing boys glistening with sweat down there, tempting us with their rippling, undeveloped muscles, grappling with each other in such a titillating manner... what was I talking about?*

THRASYMACHUS *Little boys.*

SOCRATES *No, before that. Oh, yes. Now imagine that one of those boys was heaving a javelin. It would be right for him to hit his target.*

GLAUCON *Surely.*

SOCRATES *So then every diversion from the most direct path of the javelin would be wrong.*

GLAUCON *Uh-huh.*

SOCRATES *We might imagine that the javelin encounters a gust of wind which redirects its course and causes it to miss its target. Could this not symbolize the egregious fashion faux pas of tying one's toga on the left instead of the right when attending a formal dinner in honor of the champions of the Olympic Games?*

SOCRATES *Such a parallel could not be more evident.*

THRASYMACHUS *What?*

SOCRATES *We might also imagine that this gust of wind blows the javelin in the direction of a pigeon carrying a note from an unfaithful wife to her lover, and that the javelin pierces the string tying the note to the pigeon, causing the note to flutter down to her husband below. Could not this represent neglecting, when composing an epic in dactylic hexameter, to add sufficient dactyls and spondees to compensate for elisions?*

GLAUCON *Clearly.*

THRASYMACHUS *Are you serious?*

SOCRATES *And after bisecting the string, is it not possible that the javelin might then dip towards the earth and disrupt the work of our friend Little Caesar, piercing his culinary masterpieces as he twirls them up in the air and causing him to shout in surprise, "Pizza! Pizza!"? Could this not be analogous to mistakenly proving that the square of the triangle of uniform side, when bisected at its midpoint, is congruent to the angle between the triangle and the square thrice over itself, when of course everyone knows that it is in fact the square conjoined with the trapezoid based on the bisection?*

GLAUCON *By the gods, how true!*

SOCRATES *And clearly, these three examples exhaust the spectrum of wrong actions.*

GLAUCON *Well, Socrates, I am satisfied beyond all doubt that what you say is wrong is right.*

THRASYMACHUS *But you didn't even mention murder or impiety or treason!*

SOCRATES *Those are all specialized cases of the wrongs I mentioned.*

THRASYMACHUS *You call yourself a philosopher?! You come up with a proof more full of holes than Hector after he was dragged around Troy for three days by Achilles, and then you claim you know what is wrong?*

SOCRATES *Oh, my dear Thrasy-machus, I do not know what is wrong. I know only that I know nothing.*

THRASYMACHUS *No shit, Socrates.*

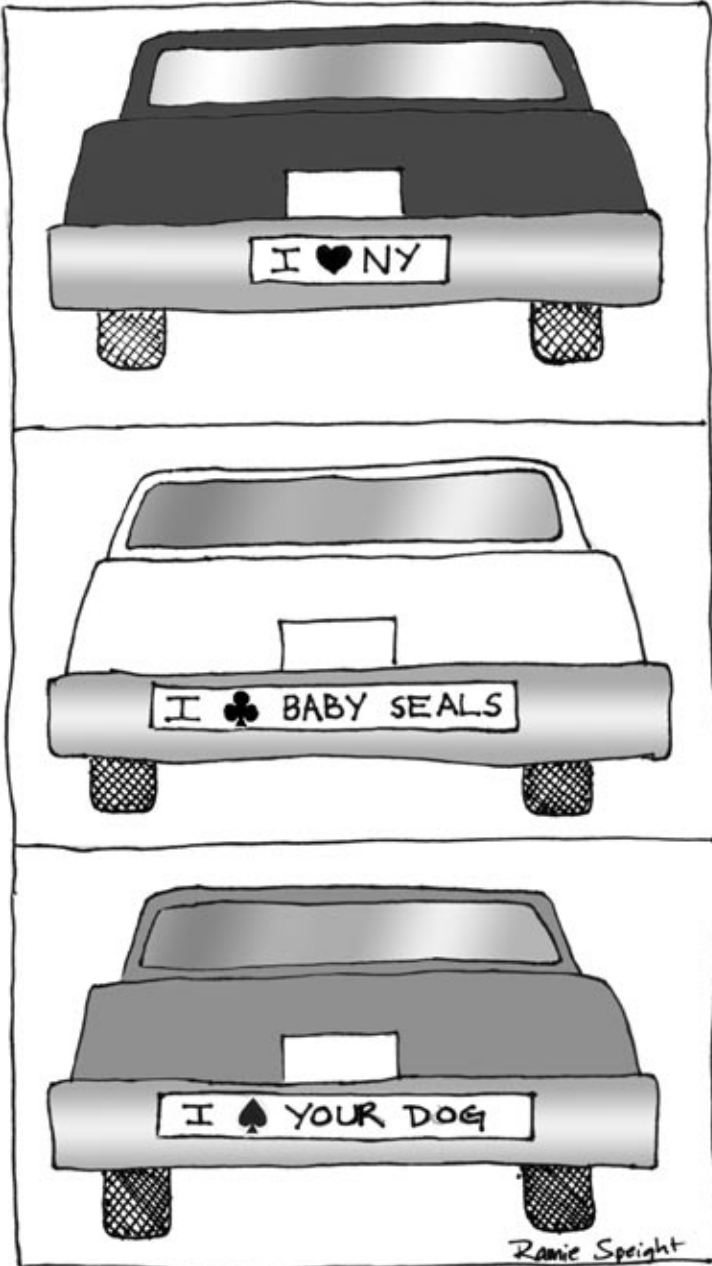
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GLAUCON *Uh-oh, guys, Coach Lombardus is coming this way!*

COACH *Hey! I thought I told you guys to stop hanging around when my boys are practicing!*

SOCRATES *Run!*

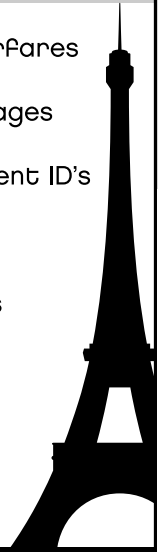
—CROWLEY and GLAZIER



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