

LESSER HIPPIAS

The great sophist Hippias, who has come to Athens on his rounds of the Greek cities, has just exhibited his talents in a discourse on Homer. Socrates asks Hippias to explain further his view on Achilles and Odysseus, the heroes of the two Homeric poems. In the poems, says Hippias, Achilles is 'best and bravest' of the Greek heroes at Troy, and truthful, while Odysseus is 'wily and a liar'—he speaks untruths. Homer implies, and Hippias agrees, that being truthful and being a liar (speaking untruths) are two distinct, contrasting things—one and the same person cannot be both truthful and a 'liar'. But is that so, Socrates wants to know? Isn't the one who has the truth about some matter the best able to tell an untruth? After all, only he is in a position even to know what would be an untruth to say! So the good and truthful man—Achilles, according to Hippias—would also be a liar, one accomplished at telling untruths. On this account, it could not be right to contrast Achilles, as a truthful person, with Odysseus as a liar—they would both have to be both. Hippias proves unable to sort these questions out satisfactorily, and so to explain adequately his own view about the differences between the two Homeric heroes: his self-proclaimed wisdom about the interpretation of Homer and indeed about everything else is thus shown up as no wisdom at all.

Toward the end of this short dialogue Socrates presses Hippias to admit that those who make moral errors 'voluntarily'—e.g., the just person, who knows what the just thing to do is, but precisely through knowing that does the unjust thing instead—are better people than those who act unjustly 'involuntarily', from ignorance and by being unjust. Given his earlier inability to show how the good, knowledgeable, truthful person is not also the liar—the person most adept at telling untruths—Hippias is in no position to reject this suggestion, however unpalatable the thought may be that just people are exquisitely good at doing injustice! Nonetheless, he resists—no doubt correctly, however illogically, given his own earlier statements. As usual, in pressing him to accept this conclusion, Socrates is arguing only on the basis of assertions Hippias has made, not his own personal views. Indeed, Socrates indicates his own disavowal of this conclusion when he introduces at the end of the dialogue his own 'if': if there is anyone who voluntarily does what is unjust, then perhaps that person would be a 'good' doer of injustice. So we have no good reason to doubt, as some scholars have done, fearing for Socrates' moral reputation, that this dialogue is Plato's work. It is cited by Aristotle under the simple title Hippias (we call it Lesser to distinguish it from the longer or Greater Hippias dialogue). As often in citing Plato, Aristotle names no author, but—provided,

as seems reasonable, that he means the reader to know it as Plato's—his citation seems to assure its genuineness.

Elsewhere in Plato we hear nothing about Eudicus, the third speaker of the dialogue, except in Greater Hippias, where Hippias says Eudicus has invited him to give the exhibition on Homer that provides the occasion for our dialogue. From this evidence he would appear to be Hippias' host in Athens, and so one of his more prominent Athenian admirers—though he is not mentioned in Protagoras among those attending him.

J.M.C.

EUDICUS: Why are you silent, Socrates, after Hippias has given such an exhibition? Why don't you either join us in praising some point or other in what he said, or else put something to the test, if it seems to you anything was not well said—especially since we who most claim to have a share in the practice of philosophy are now left to ourselves? 363

SOCRATES: Indeed, Eudicus, there are some things in what Hippias said just now about Homer that I'd like to hear more about. For your father Apemantus used to say that the *Iliad* of Homer is a finer poem than the *Odyssey*, to just the extent that Achilles is a better man than Odysseus; for, he said, one of these poems is about Odysseus and the other about Achilles. I'd like to ask about that, then, if Hippias is willing. What does he think about these two men? Which of them does he say is the better? For in his exhibition he's told us all sorts of other things both about other poets and about Homer. b c

EUDICUS: It's plain that Hippias won't object to answering any question you ask him. Right, Hippias? If Socrates asks you something, will you answer, or what will you do?

HIPPIAS: Well, it would be strange behavior if I didn't, Eudicus. I always go from my home at Elis to the festival of the Greeks at Olympia when it is held and offer myself at the temple to speak on demand about any subject I have prepared for exhibition, and to answer any questions anyone wants to ask. I can hardly flee now from answering the questions of Socrates. d

SOCRATES: What a godlike state of mind you're in, Hippias, if you go to the temple at every Olympiad so confident about your soul's wisdom! I'd be amazed if any of the athletes of the body goes there to take part in the contests as fearless and trusting about his body as you say you are about your intellect! 364

HIPPIAS: It is reasonable for me to be in that state of mind, Socrates. Ever since I began taking part in the contests at the Olympic games, I have never met anyone superior to me in anything.

Translated by Nicholas D. Smith.

b SOCRATES: A fine reply, Hippias. Your fame is a monument for wisdom to the city of Elis and to your parents. But what do you say to us about Achilles and about Odysseus? Which do you say is the better man, and in what respect? When there were many of us inside, and you were giving your exhibition, I couldn't keep up with what you were saying, but I hesitated to keep asking questions. There were so many people inside, and I didn't want to hinder your display by raising questions. But now, since there are fewer of us and Eudicus here urges me to question you, c speak, and instruct us clearly. What were you saying about these two men? How were you distinguishing them?

HIPPIAS: Well, I am glad to explain to you even more clearly than before what I say about these men and others, too. I say that Homer made Achilles the "best and bravest" man of those who went to Troy, and Nestor the wisest, and Odysseus the wiliest.

d SOCRATES: What? Hippias, will you do me the favor of not laughing at me if I have difficulty understanding what you are saying and often repeat my questions? But try to answer me gently and in a good-natured way.

HIPPIAS: It would be shameful, Socrates, if I, who teach others to do that very thing and demand a fee for it, should not myself be lenient when questioned by you and answer gently.

e SOCRATES: Finely put. But really, when you said that the poet made Achilles the "best and bravest," and when you said that he made Nestor the wisest, I thought I understood you. But when you said that he made Odysseus the wiliest—well, to tell you the truth, I don't know in the least what you mean by that. But tell me this; maybe it'll make me understand better. Doesn't Homer make Achilles wily?

HIPPIAS: Not in the least, Socrates, but most simple and truthful; for in the "Prayers," when he has them conversing, he has Achilles say to Odysseus:

365 *Son of Laertes, sprung from Zeus, resourceful Odysseus,
I must speak the word bluntly,
How I will act and how I think it shall be accomplished,
For as hateful to me as the gates of Hades
Is he who hides one thing in his mind, and says another.
b As for me, I will speak as it shall also be accomplished.¹*

In these lines he clearly shows the way of each man, that Achilles is truthful and simple, and Odysseus is wily and a liar;² for he presents Achilles as saying these words to Odysseus.

SOCRATES: Now, Hippias, it may be that I understand what you mean. You mean that the wily person is a liar, or so it appears.

1. *Iliad* ix.308–10, 12–14. The "Prayers" is the embassy scene in which Odysseus, Phoenix, and Ajax plead with Achilles to give up his anger and return to the fighting.

2. Or rather, "one who says what is false," whether or not their intent is to deceive. In what follows "liar" should be understood in that broad sense.

HIPPIAS: Certainly, Socrates. Homer presents Odysseus as that kind of person in many places, both in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey*. c

SOCRATES: So Homer, it seems, thought the truthful man was one kind of person, and the liar another, and not the same.

HIPPIAS: How could he not, Socrates?

SOCRATES: And do you yourself think so, Hippias?

HIPPIAS: Certainly, Socrates. It would be very strange if it were otherwise.

d SOCRATES: Let's dismiss Homer, then, since it's impossible to ask him what he had in mind when he wrote these lines. But since you're evidently taking up the cause, and agree with what you say he meant, answer for both Homer and yourself.

HIPPIAS: So be it. Ask briefly what you wish.

SOCRATES: Do you say that liars, like sick people, don't have the power to do anything, or that they do have the power to do something?

HIPPIAS: I say they very much have the power to do many things, and especially to deceive people.

e SOCRATES: So according to your argument they are powerful, it would seem, and wily. Right?

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Are they wily and deceivers from dimwittedness and foolishness, or by cunning and some kind of intelligence?

HIPPIAS: From cunning, absolutely, and intelligence.

SOCRATES: So they are intelligent, it seems.

HIPPIAS: Yes, by Zeus. Too much so.

SOCRATES: And being intelligent, do they not know what they are doing, or do they know?

HIPPIAS: They know very well. That's how they do their mischief.

SOCRATES: And knowing the things that they know, are they ignorant, or wise?

HIPPIAS: Wise, surely, in just these things: in deception.

366 SOCRATES: Stop. Let us recall what it is that you are saying. You claim that liars are powerful and intelligent and knowledgeable and wise in those matters in which they are liars?

HIPPIAS: That's what I claim.

SOCRATES: And that the truthful and the liars are different, complete opposites of one another?

HIPPIAS: That's what I say.

SOCRATES: Well, then. The liars are among the powerful and wise, according to your argument.

HIPPIAS: Certainly.

b SOCRATES: And when you say that the liars are powerful and wise in these very matters, do you mean that they have the power to lie if they want, or that they are without power in the matters in which they are liars?

HIPPIAS: I mean they are powerful.

SOCRATES: To put it in a nutshell, then, liars are wise and have the power to lie.

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: So a person who did not have the power to lie and was ignorant would not be a liar.

HIPPIAS: That's right.

c SOCRATES: But each person who can do what he wishes when he wishes is powerful. I mean someone who is not prevented by disease or other such things, someone like you with regard to writing my name. You have the power to do this whenever you wish to. That's what I mean. Or don't you say that one in such a condition is powerful?

HIPPIAS: I do.

SOCRATES: Now tell me, Hippias: aren't you experienced in calculating and arithmetic?

HIPPIAS: Most experienced of all, Socrates.

SOCRATES: So if someone were to ask you what three times seven hundred is, couldn't you tell him the truth about this most quickly and best of all, if you wished?

d HIPPIAS: Of course.

SOCRATES: Because you are most powerful and wisest in these matters?

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Are you, then, merely wisest and most powerful, or are you also best in those things in which you are most powerful and wisest, that is, in arithmetic?

HIPPIAS: Best also, for sure, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then would you tell the truth most powerfully about these things?

e HIPPIAS: I think so.

SOCRATES: But what about falsehoods about these same things? Please answer with the same nobility and grandeur you showed before, Hippias. If someone were to ask you what three times seven hundred is, could you lie the best, always consistently say falsehoods about these things, if you wished to lie and never to tell the truth? Or would one who is ignorant of calculations have more power than you to lie if he wished to? Don't you think the ignorant person would often involuntarily tell the truth when he wished to say falsehoods, if it so happened, because he didn't know; whereas you, the wise person, if you should wish to lie, would always consistently lie?

HIPPIAS: Yes, it is just as you say.

SOCRATES: Is the liar, then, a liar about other things but not about number—he wouldn't lie about numbers?

HIPPIAS: But yes, by Zeus, about numbers, too.

b SOCRATES: So we should also maintain this, Hippias, that there is such a person as a liar about calculation and number.

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Who would this person be? Mustn't he have the power to lie, as you just now agreed, if he is going to be a liar? If you remember, you said that one who did not have the power to lie could never become a liar.

HIPPIAS: I remember. I said that.

SOCRATES: And were you not just now shown to have the most power to lie about calculations?

HIPPIAS: Yes. I said that, too.

SOCRATES: Do you, therefore, have the most power to tell the truth about calculations?

HIPPIAS: Of course.

SOCRATES: Then the same person has the most power both to say falsehoods and to tell the truth about calculations. And this person is the one who is good with regard to these things, the arithmetician?

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then who becomes a liar about calculations, Hippias, other than the good person? For the same person is also powerful, and truthful, as well.

HIPPIAS: Apparently.

SOCRATES: Do you see, then, that the same person is both a liar and truthful about these things, and the truthful person is no better than the liar? For, indeed, he is the same person and the two are not complete opposites, as you supposed just now.

HIPPIAS: He does not appear to be, at least in this field.

SOCRATES: Do you wish to investigate some other field, then?

HIPPIAS: If you wish.

SOCRATES: All right. Are you not also experienced in geometry?

HIPPIAS: I am.

SOCRATES: Well, then. Isn't it the same way in geometry? Doesn't the same person have the most power to lie and to tell the truth about geometrical diagrams, namely, the geometer?

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Is anyone else good at these things, or the geometer?

HIPPIAS: No one else.

SOCRATES: The good and wise geometer, then, is the most powerful in both respects, isn't he? And if anyone could be a liar about diagrams, it would be this person, the good geometer? For he has the power to lie, but the bad one is powerless; and one who does not have the power to lie cannot become a liar, as you agreed.

HIPPIAS: That's right.

SOCRATES: Let us investigate a third person, the astronomer, whose craft you think you know even better than the preceding ones. Right, Hippias? 368

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Aren't the same things true in astronomy, also?

HIPPIAS: Probably, Socrates.

SOCRATES: In astronomy, too, if anyone is a liar, it will be the good astronomer, he who has the power to lie. Certainly it won't be the one who does not have the power; for he is ignorant.

HIPPIAS: That's the way it appears.

SOCRATES: So the same person will be truthful and a liar in astronomy.

HIPPIAS: So it seems.

b SOCRATES: Come then, Hippias. Examine all the sciences similarly. Is there any that's different from these, or are they all like this? You are the wisest of people in the greatest number of crafts, as I once heard you boasting. In the marketplace, next to the tables of the bankers, you told of your great and enviable wisdom. You said that you had once gone to Olympia with everything you had on your body the product of your own work. First, the ring you were wearing— you began with that—was your own work, showing that you knew how to engrave rings. And another signet, too, was your work, and a strigil³ and an oil bottle, which you had made. Then you said that you yourself had cut from leather the sandals you were wearing, and had woven your cloak and tunic. And what seemed to everyone most unusual and an exhibition of the greatest wisdom was when you said that the belt you wore around your tunic was like the very expensive Persian ones, and that you had plaited it yourself. In addition to these things, you said that you brought poems with you—epic, tragic, and dithyrambs, and many writings of all sorts in prose. You said you came with knowledge that distinguished you from all others on the subjects I was just now speaking of, and also about rhythms, and harmony, and the correctness of letters, and many other things besides, as I seem to remember. But I've forgotten to mention your artful technique (as it seems) of memory, in which you think you are most brilliant. I suppose I have forgotten a great many other things, as well. But, as I say, look both at your own crafts—for they are sufficient—and also those of others, and tell me, in accordance with what you and I have agreed upon, if you find any case in which one person is truthful and another (distinct, not the same) person is a liar. Look for one in whatever sort of wisdom or villainy you like, or whatever you want to call it; but you will not find it, my friend, for none exists. So tell me!

HIPPIAS: But I can't, Socrates; at least not offhand.

SOCRATES: And you never will, I think. But if what I say is true, you will remember what follows from our argument.

HIPPIAS: I don't entirely understand what you mean, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Presumably that's because you are not using your memory technique; plainly, you don't think you need it. But I will remind you. You realize that you said that Achilles was truthful, whereas Odysseus was a liar and wily?

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: You are now aware, then, that the same person has been discovered to be a liar and truthful, so that if Odysseus was a liar, he also becomes truthful, and if Achilles was truthful, he also becomes a liar, and these two men are not different from one another, nor opposites, but similar?

3. The strigil was a tool used to scrape from the skin the residue of olive oil used to wash off perspiration and soil after athletic exercise.

HIPPIAS: Oh, Socrates! You're always weaving arguments of this kind. You pick out whatever is the most difficult part of the argument, and fasten on to it in minute detail, and don't dispute about the whole subject under discussion. So now, if you wish, I'll prove to you by sufficient argument, based upon much evidence, that Homer made Achilles better than Odysseus and not a liar, whereas he made the latter deceitful, a teller of many lies, and worse than Achilles. If you wish, you may then offer counterarguments to mine, to the effect that the other is better. That way, these people here will know more which of us speaks better.

SOCRATES: Hippias, I don't dispute that you are wiser than I, but it is always my custom to pay attention when someone is saying something, especially when the speaker seems to me to be wise. And because I desire to learn what he means, I question him thoroughly and examine and place side-by-side the things he says, so I can learn. If the speaker seems to me to be some worthless person, I neither ask questions nor do I care what he says. This is how you'll recognize whom I consider wise. You'll find me being persistent about what's said by this sort of person, questioning him so that I can benefit by learning something. And so now I noticed as you were speaking, that in the lines you just now recited—to show that Achilles speaks to Odysseus as if Odysseus were a fraud—it seems ridiculous to me, if you speak truly, that Odysseus (the wily one), is nowhere portrayed as lying, whereas Achilles is portrayed as a wily person according to your argument. In any case, he lies. For he begins by saying the lines which you just now recited:

*For as hateful to me as the gates of Hades
Is he who hides one thing in his mind, and says another.*

A little later he says he wouldn't be persuaded by Odysseus and Agamemnon, and wouldn't stay in Troy at all. But, he says,

*Tomorrow, when I have sacrificed to Zeus and all the gods,
And loaded my ships, having dragged them to the sea,
You will see, if you want to, and if you care about such things,
My ships sailing very early on the fish-filled Hellespont,
And in them, the men eagerly rowing.
And if the glorious Earth-shaker should grant a fair voyage,
On the third day I should come to fertile Phthia.⁴*

And before that, when he was insulting Agamemnon, he said,

4. *Iliad* ix.357–63; the Earth-shaker is the god Posidon.

d Now I am going to Phthia, because it is much better
 To go home with my curved ships. I do not think
 I will stay here dishonored, and pile up riches and wealth for you.⁵

Although he said these things—once before the entire army and once before his colleagues—nowhere is he shown to have prepared or tried to drag down the ships to sail home. Rather, he shows quite a noble contempt for telling the truth. So, Hippias, I've been questioning you from the beginning because I'm confused as to which of these two men was represented as better by the poet, thinking that both were "best and bravest" and that it's hard to discern which is better, with regard both to lying and to truth, and to virtue, as well; for in this, also, the two are quite similar.

HIPPIAS: That's because you don't look at it right, Socrates. When Achilles lies, he's portrayed as lying not on purpose but involuntarily, forced to stay and help by the misfortune of the army. But the lies of Odysseus are voluntary and on purpose.

SOCRATES: You're deceiving me, my dear Hippias, and are yourself imitating Odysseus!

371 HIPPIAS: Not at all, Socrates! What do you mean? What are you referring to?

SOCRATES: To your saying that Achilles didn't lie on purpose—he, who was also such a cheat and a schemer in addition to his fraudulence, as Homer has represented him. He's shown to be so much more intelligent than Odysseus in easily defrauding him without being noticed, that right in front of the other, he dared to contradict himself and Odysseus didn't notice. In any case, Odysseus isn't portrayed as saying anything to him which shows that he perceived his lying.

HIPPIAS: What are you talking about, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Don't you know that after he said to Odysseus that he would sail away at dawn, he doesn't say again that he's going to sail away when he speaks to Ajax, but says something different?

HIPPIAS: Where?

SOCRATES: In the lines in which he says,

c I will not think of bloody war
 Until the son of thoughtful Priam, noble Hector
 Comes to the tents and the ships of the Myrmidons,
 Killing Argives, and burns the ships with blazing fire.
 But at my tent and my black ship
 I think Hector himself, though eager for battle, will stop.⁶

d So, Hippias; do you think the son of Thetis, who was taught by the most wise Chiron, was so forgetful that—though a little earlier he had insulted

5. *Iliad* i.169–71.

6. *Iliad* ix.650–55.

fraudulent people with the most extreme insults—he himself said to Odysseus that he was going to sail away, and to Ajax that he was going to stay? And he wasn't doing this on purpose, supposing that Odysseus was an old fool, and that he himself could get the better of him by precisely such conniving and lying?

HIPPIAS: It doesn't seem that way to me, Socrates. Rather, in these things, too, it was because of his guilelessness⁷ that he was led to say something different to Ajax and to Odysseus. But when Odysseus tells the truth, he always has a purpose, and when he lies, it's the same.

SOCRATES: Then it seems that Odysseus is better than Achilles after all.

HIPPIAS: Not at all, surely, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Why not? Didn't it emerge just now that the voluntary liars are better than the involuntary ones?

HIPPIAS: But Socrates, how could those who are voluntarily unjust, and are voluntary and purposeful evil-doers, be better than those who act that way involuntarily? For these people, there seems to be much lenience, when they act unjustly without knowing, or lie, or do some other evil. The laws, too, are surely much harsher towards those who do evil and lie voluntarily than towards those who do so involuntarily.

SOCRATES: You see, Hippias, that I am telling the truth when I say that I'm persistent in questioning wise people? It may be that this is the only good trait I have and that all the others I have are quite worthless. I make mistakes as to the way things are, and don't know how they are—I find it sufficient evidence of this that when I am with one of you who are highly regarded for wisdom, and to whose wisdom all the Greeks bear witness, I show myself to know nothing. For I think pretty well none of the same things as you do; yet what greater evidence of ignorance is there than when someone disagrees with wise men? But I have one wonderfully good trait, which saves me: I'm not ashamed to learn. I inquire and ask questions and I'm very grateful to the one who answers, and I've never failed in gratitude to anyone. I've never denied it when I've learned anything, pretending that what I learned was my own discovery. Instead, I sing the praises of the one who taught me as a wise person, and proclaim what I learned from him. So indeed now, I don't agree with what you are saying but disagree very strongly. But I know very well that this is my fault—it's because I'm the sort of person I am, not to say anything better of myself than I deserve. To me, Hippias, it appears entirely the opposite to what you say: those who harm people and commit injustice and lie and cheat and go wrong voluntarily, rather than involuntarily, are better than those who do so involuntarily. However, sometimes I believe the opposite, and I go back and forth about all this—plainly because I don't know. But now at this moment a fit of lightheadedness has come over me, and I think those who voluntarily go wrong regarding something are better than those who do so involuntarily. I blame the preceding arguments for my present

7. Reading *euêtheias* in e1.

condition, making it appear to me now that those who do any of these things involuntarily are more worthless than those who do them voluntarily. So please be nice and don't refuse to cure my soul. You'll do me a much greater good if you give my soul relief from ignorance, than if you gave my body relief from disease. But if you wish to give a long speech, I tell you in advance that you wouldn't cure me, for I couldn't follow you. If you are willing to answer me as you did just now, you'll benefit me a great deal, and I think you yourself won't be harmed. I might justly call for *your* help, too, son of Apemantus, for you goaded me into a discussion with Hippias. So now, if Hippias isn't willing to answer me, ask him for me.

b EUDICUS: Well, Socrates, I don't think Hippias will need us to plead with him. For that's not what he said earlier; he said that he wouldn't flee from any man's questioning. Right, Hippias? Isn't that what you said?

HIPPIAS: I did. But Socrates always creates confusion in arguments, and seems to argue unfairly.

SOCRATES: Oh excellent Hippias, I don't do that voluntarily, for then I'd be wise and awesome, according to your argument, but involuntarily. So please be lenient with me, for you say that one who acts unfairly involuntarily should be treated leniently.

c EUDICUS: By all means don't do otherwise, Hippias. For our sakes and for the sake of what you said earlier, answer what Socrates asks you.

HIPPIAS: I will answer, then, since you beg me to. Ask whatever you wish.

SOCRATES: I want very much, Hippias, to investigate what we were just now saying: whether those who go wrong voluntarily, or those who go wrong involuntarily are better. I think the most correct way to pursue our investigation is as follows. You answer. Do you call one sort of runner a good one?

d HIPPIAS: I do.

SOCRATES: And one sort bad?

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: You think one who runs well is a good runner; one who runs badly, a bad one?

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And one who runs slowly runs badly, and one who runs quickly runs well?

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: In a race, then, and in running, quickness is a good thing, and slowness, bad?

HIPPIAS: What else would it be?

SOCRATES: Which one is the better runner, then: the one who runs slowly voluntarily, or the one who does so involuntarily?

HIPPIAS: The one who does so voluntarily.

SOCRATES: And isn't running doing something?

HIPPIAS: Doing something, of course.

SOCRATES: If doing, doesn't it also accomplish something?

e HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: So one who runs badly accomplishes something bad and shameful in a race?

HIPPIAS: Bad; how else?

SOCRATES: One who runs slowly runs badly?

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: So the good runner voluntarily accomplishes this bad and shameful thing, and the bad runner, involuntarily?

HIPPIAS: So it seems, at least.

SOCRATES: In a race, then, one who accomplishes bad things involuntarily is more worthless than one who does them voluntarily?

HIPPIAS: In a race, at least.

SOCRATES: What about in wrestling? Which is the better wrestler, one who falls down voluntarily, or involuntarily?

HIPPIAS: One who does so voluntarily, it seems.

SOCRATES: Is it more worthless and shameful in wrestling to fall down or to knock down the opponent?

HIPPIAS: To fall down.

SOCRATES: So also in wrestling, one who voluntarily has worthless and shameful accomplishments is a better wrestler than one who has them involuntarily.

HIPPIAS: So it seems.

SOCRATES: What about in other physical activities? Isn't the physically better person able to accomplish both sorts of things: the strong *and* the weak, the shameful *and* the fine? So whenever he accomplishes worthless physical results, the one who is physically better does them voluntarily, whereas the one who is worse does them involuntarily?

HIPPIAS: That how it seems to be in matters of strength, also.

SOCRATES: What about gracefulness, Hippias? Doesn't the better body strike shameful and worthless poses voluntarily, and the worse body involuntarily? What do you think?

HIPPIAS: That's right.

SOCRATES: So awkwardness, when voluntary, counts toward virtue, but when involuntary, toward worthlessness.

HIPPIAS: Apparently.

SOCRATES: What do you say about the voice? Which do you say is better, one that sings out of tune voluntarily, or involuntarily?

HIPPIAS: One that does so voluntarily.

SOCRATES: And the one that does so involuntarily is in a worse condition?

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Would you prefer to possess good or bad things?

HIPPIAS: Good.

SOCRATES: Then would you prefer to possess feet that limp voluntarily, or involuntarily?

HIPPIAS: Voluntarily.

SOCRATES: But doesn't having a limp mean having worthless and awkward feet?

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well, again; doesn't dullness of sight mean having worthless eyes?

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Which sort of eyes, then, would you wish to possess and live with: those with which you would see dully and incorrectly voluntarily, or involuntarily?

HIPPIAS: Those with which one would do so voluntarily.

SOCRATES: So you regard organs that voluntarily accomplish worthless results as better than those that do so involuntarily?

HIPPIAS: Yes, in these sorts of cases.

SOCRATES: So then one statement embraces them all, ears, nose, mouth and all the senses: those that involuntarily accomplish bad results aren't worth having because they're worthless, whereas those that do so voluntarily are worth having because they're good.

HIPPIAS: I think so.

SOCRATES: Well, then. Which tools are better to work with? Those with which one accomplishes bad results voluntarily, or involuntarily? For example, is a rudder with which one will involuntarily steer badly better, or one with which one will do so voluntarily?

HIPPIAS: One with which one will do so voluntarily.

SOCRATES: Isn't it the same with a bow, a lyre, flutes, and all the rest?

375 HIPPIAS: What you say is true.

SOCRATES: Well, then. Is it better to possess a horse with such a soul that one could ride it badly voluntarily, or involuntarily?

HIPPIAS: Voluntarily.

SOCRATES: So that's a better one.

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: With the better horse's soul, then, one would voluntarily do the worthless acts of this soul, but with the soul of the worthless mare one would do them involuntarily.

HIPPIAS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And so also with a dog and all other animals?

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well now, then. For an archer, is it better to possess a soul which voluntarily misses the target, or one which does so involuntarily?

HIPPIAS: One which does so voluntarily.

SOCRATES: So this sort of soul is better also for archery?

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: A soul which involuntarily misses the mark is more worthless than one which does so voluntarily.

HIPPIAS: In archery, anyway.

SOCRATES: How about in medicine? Isn't one that voluntarily accomplishes bad things for the body better at medicine?

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then this sort of soul is better at this craft than the other.

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well, then. As to the soul that plays the lyre and the flute better and does everything else better in the crafts and the sciences—doesn't it accomplish bad and shameful things and miss the mark voluntarily, whereas the more worthless does this involuntarily?

HIPPIAS: Apparently.

SOCRATES: And perhaps we would prefer to have slaves with souls that voluntarily miss the mark and act badly, rather than those which do so involuntarily, as being better at these things.

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well, then. Would we not wish to possess our own soul in the best condition?

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: So, will it be better if it acts badly and misses the mark voluntarily or involuntarily?

HIPPIAS: But it would be terrible, Socrates, if those who commit injustice voluntarily are to be better than those who do it involuntarily!

SOCRATES: But nonetheless they appear to be, at least given what's been said.

HIPPIAS: Not to me.

SOCRATES: But I thought, Hippias, that they appeared to be so to you, too. But answer again: isn't justice either some sort of power or knowledge, or both? Or isn't justice necessarily one of these things?

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: So if justice is a power of the soul, isn't the more powerful soul the more just? For, my excellent friend, it appeared to us, didn't it, that one of this sort was better?

HIPPIAS: Yes, it did.

SOCRATES: And if it's knowledge? Then isn't the wiser soul more just and the more ignorant more unjust?

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And if it's both? Then isn't the soul which has both—knowledge and power—more just, and the more ignorant more unjust? Isn't that necessarily so?

HIPPIAS: It appears so.

SOCRATES: This more powerful and wiser soul was seen to be better and to have more power to do both fine and shameful in everything it accomplishes?

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Whenever it accomplishes shameful results, then, it does so voluntarily, by power and craft, and these things appear to be attributes of justice, either both or one of them.

HIPPIAS: So it seems.

SOCRATES: And to do injustice is to do bad, whereas to refrain from injustice is to do something fine.

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: So the more powerful and better soul, when it does injustice, will do injustice voluntarily, and the worthless soul involuntarily?

HIPPIAS: Apparently.

376b SOCRATES: And isn't the good man the one who has a good soul, and the bad man the one who has a bad soul?

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Therefore, it's up to the good man to do injustice voluntarily, and the bad man to do it involuntarily; that is, if the good man has a good soul.

HIPPIAS: But surely he has.

SOCRATES: So the one who voluntarily misses the mark and does what is shameful and unjust, Hippias—that is, if there is such a person—would be no other than the good man.

HIPPIAS: I can't agree with you in that, Socrates.

c SOCRATES: Nor I with myself, Hippias. But given the argument, we can't help having it look that way to us, now, at any rate. However, as I said before, on these matters I waver back and forth and never believe the same thing. And it's not surprising at all that I or any other ordinary person *should* waver. But if you wise men are going to do it, too—that means something terrible for us, if we can't stop our wavering even after we've put ourselves in your company.

ION

A 'rhapsode' is a professional reciter of the poetry of Homer and certain other prestigious early poets of Greece. In Athens the prize-winning rhapsode Ion from Ephesus (we do not know whether he is a historical personage or Plato's invention) runs into Socrates, who expresses admiration for his profession and questions him about it. *Theirs is a private conversation, apparently with no others present (as in Euthyphro). Ion professes not just to recite superbly Homer's poetry (his specialty) but also to speak beautifully in his own right about Homer—in interpreting and explaining his poetry and its excellences. Socrates is more interested in this second aspect of Ion's professional expertise than in the first. He wants to know whether Ion speaks about Homer 'on the basis of knowledge or mastery': is he the master of some body of knowledge, which he employs and expresses in speaking about Homer?*

The chief interest of this short dialogue, apart from its comical portrayal of Ion's enthusiasm for his own skills, lies in the way Socrates develops his own view—which Ion in the end blithely accepts!—that Ion speaks not from knowledge but from inspiration, his thoughts being 'breathed into' him without the use of his own understanding at all. Using the analogy of a magnet, with the power to draw one iron ring to itself, and through that another, and another, Socrates suggests that Homer himself—the greatest of the Greek poets—had no knowledge of his own in writing his poetry, but was divinely possessed. Ion and other expert rhapsodes are also divinely possessed—as it were, 'magnetized'—through him, both when they recite his poetry and when they speak about it—and they pass on the inspiration to their hearers, who are in a state of divine possession in opening themselves to the poetry. Neither poets nor rhapsodes have any knowledge or mastery of anything: their work, with all its beauty, is the product of the gods working through them, not of any human intelligence and skill. Thus these minor characters, the rhapsodes, provide Socrates entrée to much bigger game, the poet Homer himself, the great 'teacher' of the Greeks. Readers should compare (and contrast) Socrates' criticisms of Homer here with those in Republic II and III, and his critique of poetry in X, along with the views about poetic 'madness' that he advances in Phaedrus and elsewhere.

J.M.C.