

[HIPPIAS]: ... I have a speech about that I put together really finely, and I put the words particularly well. My setting and the starting point of the speech are something like this: After Troy was taken, the tale is told that Neoptolemus asked Nestor<sup>6</sup> what sort of activities are fine—the sort of activities that would make someone most famous if he adopted them while young. After that the speaker is Nestor, who teaches him a very great many very fine customs. I displayed that there and I expect to display it here the day after tomorrow, in Phidostratus' schoolroom—with many other fine things worth hearing. Eudicus,<sup>7</sup> Apemantus' son, invited me. But why don't you come too, and bring some more people, if they are capable of hearing and judging what is said?

SOCRATES: Certainly, Hippias, if all goes well. But now answer me a short question about that; it's a fine thing you reminded me. Just now someone got me badly stuck when I was finding fault with parts of some speeches for being foul, and praising other parts as fine. He questioned me this way, really insultingly: "Socrates, how do *you* know what sorts of things are fine and foul? Look, would you be able to say what the fine is?" And I, I'm so worthless, I was stuck and I wasn't able to answer him properly. As I left the gathering I was angry and blamed myself, and I made a threatening resolve, that whomever of you wise men I met *first*, I would listen and learn and study, then return to the questioner and fight the argument back. So, as I say, it's a fine thing you came now. Teach me enough about what the fine is itself, and try to answer me with the greatest precision possible, so I won't be a laughingstock again for having been refuted a second time. Of course you know it clearly; it would be a pretty small bit of learning out of the many things *you* know.

HIPPIAS: Small indeed, Socrates, and not worth a thing, as they say.

SOCRATES: Then I'll learn it easily, and no one will ever refute me again.

287 HIPPIAS: No one will. Or what I do would be crude and amateurish.

SOCRATES: Very well said, Hippias—if we defeat the man! Will it hurt if I act like him and take the other side of the argument when you answer, so that you'll give me the most practice? I have some experience of the other side. So if it's the same to you I'd like to take the other side, to learn more strongly.

b HIPPIAS: Take the other side. And, as I just said, the question is not large. I could teach you to answer much harder things than that so no human being could refute you.

SOCRATES: That's amazingly well said! Now, since it's your command, let me become the man as best I can and try to question you. If you displayed that speech to him, the one you mentioned about the fine activities, he'd listen, and when you stopped speaking he'd ask not about anything else

6. Neoptolemus, son of Achilles, is the type of the young hero; Nestor, the oldest of the Greeks in the expedition against Troy, is a proverbial wise old man.

7. Eudicus was probably Hippias' host in Athens (*Lesser Hippias* 363b). Nothing is known about Phidostratus.

but about the fine—that's a sort of habit with him—and he'd say: "O visitor from Elis, is it not by justice that just people are just?" Answer, Hippias, as if *he* were the questioner.

HIPPIAS: I shall answer that it is by justice.

SOCRATES: "And is this justice *something*?"

HIPPIAS: Very much so.

SOCRATES: "And by wisdom wise people are wise, and by the good all good things are good?"

HIPPIAS: How could they be otherwise?

SOCRATES: "... by these each *being* something? Of course, it can't be that they're not."

HIPPIAS: They are.

SOCRATES: "Then all fine things, too, are fine by the fine, isn't that so?"

HIPPIAS: Yes, by the fine.

SOCRATES: "... by that being *something*?"

HIPPIAS: It is. Why not?

SOCRATES: "Tell me then, visitor," he'll say, "what is that, the fine?"

HIPPIAS: Doesn't the person who asks this want to find out what is a fine thing?

SOCRATES: I don't think so, Hippias. What is *the* fine.

HIPPIAS: And what's the difference between the one and the other?

SOCRATES: You don't think there is any?

HIPPIAS: There's no difference.

SOCRATES: Well, clearly your knowledge is finer. But look here, he's asking you not what is a fine thing, but what is the fine.

HIPPIAS: My friend, I understand. I will indeed tell him what the fine is, and never will I be refuted. Listen, Socrates, to tell the truth, a fine girl is a fine thing.

SOCRATES: That's fine, Hippias; by Dog you have a glorious answer. So you really think, if I gave that answer, I'd be answering what was asked, and correctly, and never will I be refuted?

HIPPIAS: Socrates, how could you be refuted when you say what everyone thinks, when everyone who hears you will testify that you're right?

SOCRATES: Very well. Certainly. Now, look, Hippias, let me go over what you said for myself. *He* will question me somewhat like this: "Come now, Socrates, give me an answer. All those things you say are fine, will they be fine if the fine itself is *what*?" Shall I say that if a fine girl is a fine thing, those things will be fine because of that?

HIPPIAS: Then do you think that man will still try to refute you—that what you say is not a fine thing—or if he does try, he won't be a laughingstock?

SOCRATES: You're wonderful! But I'm sure he'll try. Whether trying will make him a laughingstock—we'll see about that. But I want to tell you what he'll say.

HIPPIAS: Tell me.

SOCRATES: "How sweet you are, Socrates," he'll say. "Isn't a fine Elean mare a fine thing? The god praised mares in his oracle." What shall we

say, Hippias? Mustn't we say that the mare is a fine thing? At least if it's a fine one. How could we dare deny that the fine thing is a fine thing?

HIPPIAS: That's true, Socrates. And the god was right to say that too. We breed very fine mares in our country.

SOCRATES: "Very well," he'll say. "What about a fine lyre? Isn't it a fine thing?" Shouldn't we say so, Hippias?

HIPPIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then after that he'll ask—I know fairly well, judging from the way he is—"Then what about a fine pot, my good fellow? Isn't it a fine thing?"

d HIPPIAS: Who is the man, Socrates? What a boor he is to dare in an august proceeding to speak such vulgar speech that way!

SOCRATES: He's like that, Hippias, not refined. He's garbage, he cares about nothing but the truth. Still the man must have an answer; so here's my first opinion: *If* the pot should have been turned by a good potter, smooth and round and finely fired, like some of those fine two-handled e pots that hold six choes, very fine ones—if he's asking about a pot like that, we have to agree it's fine. How could we say that what is fine is not a fine thing?

HIPPIAS: We couldn't, Socrates.

SOCRATES: "Then is a fine pot a fine thing too? Answer me!" he'll say.

289 HIPPIAS: But I think that's so, Socrates. Even that utensil is fine if finely made. But on the whole that's not worth judging fine, compared to a horse and a girl and all the other fine things.

SOCRATES: Very well. Then I understand how we'll have to answer him when he asks this question, here: "Don't you know that what Heraclitus said holds good—the finest of monkeys is foul put together with another class,<sup>8</sup> and the finest of pots is foul put together with the class of girls; so says Hippias the wise." Isn't that so, Hippias?

HIPPIAS: Of course, Socrates. Your answer's right.

b SOCRATES: Then listen. I'm sure of what he'll say next. "What? If you put the class of girls together with the class of gods, won't the same thing happen as happened when the class of pots was put together with that of girls? Won't the finest girl be seen to be foul? And didn't Heraclitus (whom you bring in) say the same thing too, that 'the wisest of men is seen to be a monkey compared to god in wisdom and fineness and everything else?'" Should we agree, Hippias, that the finest girl is foul compared to the class of gods?

HIPPIAS: Who would object to that, Socrates?

c SOCRATES: Then if we agreed to that, he'd laugh and say, "Socrates, do you remember what you were asked?" "Yes," I'll say: "Whatever is the fine itself?" "Then," he'll say, "when you were asked for the fine, do you answer with something that turns out to be no more fine than foul, as you

8. Reading *allōi* at a4; Heraclitus B82 Diels-Kranz.

say yourself?" "Apparently," I'll say. Or what do you advise me to say, my friend?

HIPPIAS: That's what I'd say. Because compared to gods, anyway, the human race is not fine—that's true.

d SOCRATES: He'll say: "If I had asked you from the beginning what is both fine and foul, and you had given me the answer you just gave, then wouldn't you have given the right answer? Do you *still* think that the fine itself by which everything else is beautified and seen to be fine when that form is added to it—that *that* is a girl or a horse or a lyre?"

HIPPIAS: But if *that's* what he's looking for, it's the easiest thing in the world to answer him and tell him what the fine (thing) is by which everything else is beautified and is seen to be fine when it is added. The man's e quite simple; he has no feeling at all for fine possessions. If you answer him that this thing he's asking for, the fine, is just *gold*, he'll be stuck and won't try to refute you. Because we all know, don't we, that wherever that is added, even if it was seen to be foul before, it will be seen to be fine when it has been beautified with gold.

SOCRATES: You have no experience of this man, Hippias. He stops at nothing, and he never accepts anything easily.

HIPPIAS: So what? He *must* accept what's said correctly, or, if not, be a laughingstock. 290

SOCRATES: Well, *that* answer he certainly will not accept, my friend. And what's more, he'll jeer at me, and say, "Are you crazy? Do you think Phidias<sup>9</sup> is a bad workman?" And I think I'll say, "No, not at all."

HIPPIAS: And you'll be right about that.

b SOCRATES: Right enough. Then when I agree that Phidias is a good workman, this person will say, "Next, do you think Phidias didn't know about this fine thing you mention?" "What's the point?" I'll say. "The point is," he'll say, "that Phidias didn't make Athena's eyes out of gold, nor the rest of her face, nor her feet, nor her hands—as he would have done if gold would really have made them be seen to be finest—but he made them out of ivory. Apparently he went wrong through ignorance; he didn't know gold was what made everything fine, wherever it is added." What shall we answer when he says that, Hippias?

c HIPPIAS: It's not hard. We'll say he made the statue right. Ivory's fine too, I think.

SOCRATES: "Then why didn't he work the middles of the eyes out of ivory? He used stone, and he found stone that resembled ivory as closely as possible. Isn't a stone a fine thing too, if it's a fine one?" Shall we agree?

HIPPIAS: Yes, at least when it's appropriate.

SOCRATES: "But when it's not appropriate it's foul?" Do I agree or not?

HIPPIAS: Yes, when it's not appropriate anyway.

9. Phidias (b. ca. 490 B.C.), an Athenian sculptor, was best known as designer of the Parthenon sculptures. The statue of Athena mentioned in Socrates' next speech was fashioned of ivory and gold for the Parthenon.

d SOCRATES: "Well," he'll say. "You're a wise man! Don't ivory and gold make things be seen to be fine when they're appropriate, but foul when they're not?" Shall we be negative? Or shall we agree with him that he's right?

HIPPIAS: We'll agree to *this*: whatever is appropriate to each thing makes that particular thing fine.

SOCRATES: "Then," he'll say; "when someone boils the pot we just mentioned, the fine one, full of fine bean soup, is a gold stirring spoon or a figwood one more appropriate?"

e HIPPIAS: Heracles! What kind of man is this! Won't you tell me who he is?

SOCRATES: You wouldn't know him if I told you the name.

HIPPIAS: But I know right now he's an ignoramus.

SOCRATES: Oh, he's a real plague, Hippias. Still, what shall we say? Which of the two spoons is appropriate to the soup and the pot? Isn't it clearly the wooden one? It makes the soup smell better, and at the same time, my friend, it won't break our pot, spill out the soup, put out the fire, and make us do without a truly noble meal, when we were going to have a banquet. That gold spoon would do all these things; so I think we should  
291 say the figwood spoon is more appropriate than the gold one, unless you say otherwise.

HIPPIAS: Yes, it's more appropriate. But I wouldn't talk with a man who asked things like that.

SOCRATES: Right you are. It wouldn't be appropriate for you to be filled up with words like that, when you're so finely dressed, finely shod, and famous for wisdom all over Greece. But it's nothing much for me to mix  
b with him. So help me get prepared. Answer for my sake. "If the figwood is really more appropriate than the gold," the man will say, "wouldn't it be finer? Since you agreed, Socrates, that the appropriate is finer than the not appropriate?"

Hippias, don't we agree that the figwood spoon is finer than the gold one?

b HIPPIAS: Would you like me to tell you what you can say the fine is—and save yourself a lot of argument?

c SOCRATES: Certainly. But not before you tell me how to answer. Which of those two spoons I just mentioned is appropriate and finer?

HIPPIAS: Answer, if you'd like, that it's the one made of fig.

SOCRATES: Now tell me what you were going to say. Because by *that* answer, if I say the fine is gold, apparently I'll be made to see that gold is no finer than wood from a figtree. So what do you say the fine is this time?

d HIPPIAS: I'll tell you. I think you're looking for an answer that says the fine is the sort of thing that will never be seen to be foul for anyone, anywhere, at any time.

SOCRATES: Quite right, Hippias. Now you've got a fine grasp of it.

HIPPIAS: Listen now, if anyone has anything to say against *this*, you can certainly say I'm not an expert on anything.

SOCRATES: Tell me quickly, for god's sake.

HIPPIAS: I say, then, that it is always finest, both for every man and in every place, to be rich, healthy, and honored by the Greeks, to arrive at old age, to make a fine memorial to his parents when they die, and to have a fine, grand burial from his own children.

SOCRATES: Hurray, Hippias! What a wonderful long speech, worthy of yourself! I'm really delighted at the kind way in which—to the best of your ability—you've helped me out. But we didn't hit the enemy, and now he'll certainly laugh at us harder than ever.

HIPPIAS: That laughter won't do him any good, Socrates. When he has nothing to say in reply, but laughs anyway, he'll be laughing at himself,  
292 and he'll be a laughingstock to those around.

SOCRATES: That may be so. But maybe, as I suspect, he'll do more than laugh at me for that answer.

HIPPIAS: What do you mean?

SOCRATES: If he happens to have a stick, and I don't run and run away from him, he'll try to give me a thrashing.

HIPPIAS: What? Is the man your owner or something? Do you mean he could do that and not be arrested and convicted? Or don't you have any laws in this city, but people are allowed to hit each other without any right?  
b

SOCRATES: No, that's not allowed at all.

HIPPIAS: Then he'll be punished for hitting you without any right.

SOCRATES: I don't think so, Hippias. No, if I gave *that* answer he'd have a right—in *my* opinion anyway.

HIPPIAS: Then I think so too, seeing that you yourself believe it.

SOCRATES: Should I tell you why I believe he'd have a right to hit me if I gave that answer? Or will you hit me without trial too? Will you hear my case?

HIPPIAS: It would be awful if I wouldn't. What do you have to say?  
c

SOCRATES: I'll tell you the same way as before. I'll be acting out his part—so the words I use are not directed against you; they're like what he says to me, harsh and grotesque. "Tell me, Socrates," you can be sure he'll say, "do you think it's wrong for a man to be whipped when he sings such a dithyramb<sup>10</sup> as that, so raucously, way out of tune with the question?"

"How?" I'll say. "How!" he'll say. "Aren't you capable of remembering that I asked for the fine itself? For what when added to anything—whether  
d to a stone or a plank or a man or a god or any action or any lesson—*anything* gets to be fine? I'm asking you to tell me what fineness is itself, my man, and I am no more able to make you hear me than if you were sitting here in stone—and a millstone at that, with no ears and no brain!"

Hippias, wouldn't you be upset if I got scared and came back with this:  
e "But that's what Hippias said the fine was. And I asked him the way you asked me, for that which is fine always and for everyone." So what do you say? Wouldn't you be upset if I said that?

10. A dithyramb is a sort of choral ode heavily embellished with music.

HIPPIAS: Socrates, I know perfectly well that what I said is fine for everyone—everyone will think so.

SOCRATES: "And *will* be fine?" he'll ask. "I suppose the fine is always fine."

HIPPIAS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: "Then it *was* fine, too," he'll say.

HIPPIAS: It was.

293 SOCRATES: "For Achilles as well?" he'll ask. "Does the visitor from Elis say it is fine for *him* to be buried after his parents? And for his grandfather Aeacus? And for the other children of the gods? And for the gods themselves?"<sup>11</sup>

HIPPIAS: What's that? Go to blessedness. These questions the man asks, Socrates, they're sacrilegious!

SOCRATES: What? Is it a sacrilege to say that's so when someone else asks the question?

HIPPIAS: Maybe.

SOCRATES: "Then maybe you're the one who says that it is fine for everyone, always, to be buried by his children, and to bury his parents? And isn't Heracles included in 'everyone' as well as everybody we mentioned a moment ago?"

HIPPIAS: But I didn't mean it for the *gods*.

b SOCRATES: "Apparently you didn't mean it for the heroes either."

HIPPIAS: Not if they're children of gods.

SOCRATES: "But if they're not?"

HIPPIAS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: "Then according to your latest theory, I see, what's awful and unholy and foul for some heroes—Tantalus and Dardanus and Zethus—is fine for Pelops and those with similar parentage."

HIPPIAS: That's my opinion.

c SOCRATES: "Then what you think is what you did not say a moment ago—that being buried by your children and burying your parents is foul sometimes, and for some people. Apparently it's still more impossible for that to become and be fine for everyone; so that has met the same fate as the earlier ones, the girl and the pot, and a more laughable fate besides; it is fine for some, not fine for others. And to this very day, Socrates, you aren't able to answer the question about the fine, what it is."

That's how he'll scold me—and he's right if I give him such an answer.

11. Achilles' mother, Thetis, was a goddess. His grandfather, Aeacus, was a son of Zeus. Heracles, Tantalus, Dardanus, and Zethus (below) were all said to be sons of Zeus. Pelops, son of Tantalus, was of human parentage.