

## SOCRATES IT IS BETTER TO SUFFER INJUSTICE THAN TO COMMIT IT

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Socrates *on intrinsically Evil Acts that are of the “natural law”* SOCRATES: Let us say that under no circumstances should one intentionally do wrong, or should one do so under some circumstances, but not under others? Or is the Injustice or wrongdoing not in any case good or beautiful, as we have often agreed in the past [...]the wrongdoing is harmful to the one who does it, and it is shameful of him in every respect to do it? Shall we say this or not?

CRITO: That is what we want.

SOCRATES: In no way, then, shall one do wrong?

CRITO: No of course.

SOCRATES: So not even he to whom injustice has been done may do injustice or unrighteousness again, as most believe, when one may not do injustice in any way? [...] and how yet: May one maltreat or not? [...] (or) maltreating again after one has been treated badly, is that, as most say, just or not?

CRITO: In no way.

SOCRATES: [...] Neither one may insult again, nor maltreat any man, and even if one suffers from him, whatever it may be. And watch carefully, Criton, when you admit this, that you do not admit it against your opinion. For I well know that only few have this conviction and ever will have it ...

Plato, Crito, 49 a-d.

### I. Why Is Wrongdoing a Greater Evil for Man than Suffering Injustice

In the following, I would like to present the subtle insights and arguments for the Socratic thesis explained in Plato's *Gorgias* that doing wrong is a worse evil for the wrongdoer than suffering the worst Injustice oneself. These insights refute any purely teleological ethics of “weighing the good effects of action against the bad ones, “which is why we would like to recall them in the context of this book:

SOCRATES: Of the two now, unrighteousness and wrong-doing is the greater evil, and the lesser evil is suffering injustice. (Gorgias, 509c)

Behind these simple and famous words of Socrates, there are ethical insights whose immense dimensions only escape us because we look at the Socratic words either thoughtlessly or as a purely historical body of thought, or again because we see them from the perspective of a Christian understanding of the world in which they fit seamlessly and, as it were, quite naturally.

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However, let us look at this Socratic proposition and its inexorable logical consequences in Plato's dialogue from the point of view of the "normal" human view of life as seen by the partners in the dialogue, from which this sentence is taken, Gorgias, Polos and Callicles. If we do so, the true dimensions of this Socratic insight, which also plays a central role in Socrates' *Apology*, disclose themselves. The same ethical intuitions are also central to understand the first two and the tenth book of the *Politeia*, as well as *Crito*, *Euthyphro*, *Theaetetus*, *The Laws* and other Platonic dialogues.

*A. Committing Injustice is not a greater evil than suffering it because committing evil will lead to more painful Punishment after Death*

However, even much more overwhelming than his famous statement about suffering Injustice being a lesser evil than committing it is the Socratic reasoning and especially the last logical consequences, which the Platonic Socrates relentlessly draws from the mentioned ethical thesis: they seem to be almost crazy. If Socrates had said that doing wrong was worse than suffering any wrong, because, after this life, moral evil will be followed by such great suffering of punishment, that the earthly suffering of Injustice is comparatively small, Gorgias, Polos, and Callicles would certainly have denied that this was really so but would have agreed to it in case it really would be so.

Nevertheless, the Platonic Socrates gives an almost radically opposite justification of his thesis that doing wrong is a greater evil in virtue of the punishment that will follow it. Indeed, he makes an assertion that must appear absurd and paradoxical not only to the sophistic interlocutors, according to whom power goes before right, but to all of us: namely, that unpunished wrongdoing, upon which no suffering of a just punishment follows, is an even greater evil than wrongdoing followed by punishment.

Indeed, the revolutionary character of these Socratic affirmations about committing a morally evil act being a greater evil for man than suffering it is even surpassed by the further thesis that it is better, not only in itself, i.e., from the standpoint of pure, absolute justice, if the evil one is punished, and that therefore, from an absolute value point of view, unpunished wrongdoing is the greatest evil. Instead, it is even better *for the person* who is punished if he is punished for his wrongdoing than if the evil he has committed will never be punished. On the contrary: unpunished Injustice is the greatest evil not only in itself but also *for man* – not only for the person who will be purified by accepting due punishment but even for the incurably wicked person. We will return to this insight in section 2 of the present chapter.

*B. The inner beauty and absoluteness of the good and the greater ugliness (aiścōrion) of moral evil as an argument for the character of committing Injustice being a worse evil than suffering it*

1. First, the morally good is more beautiful than being free from suffering and other evils, and vice versa, doing wrong is uglier and more detestable (αἴσχιον), though not more unpleasant and painful) than suffering Injustice. The moral unworthiness of doing wrong as a moral αἰσχροῦν (shameful) evil is a worse evil than unjust suffering. However, it is precisely at this point that the Socratic arguments and other insights are ignited: The morally good (justice) demands to be done, while the morally evil must not be done ever. Moreover, this absoluteness, with which the moral world order forbids ever to do or voluntarily accept moral evil, does not apply to the evil of suffering Injustice. Therefore, also Socrates' *Daimonion* warns him only of doing wrong, not of suffering Injustice and death, from which Socrates concludes that doing wrong is a greater evil than suffering Injustice and death because no comparable inner voice commands us to flee it. There is no moral obligation to avoid suffering and death under all circumstances, and because these are in no way ugly and shameful like doing what is morally evil.

2. These Socratic insights are closely connected with the one that not only Injustice is not to be done under any circumstances, but that there are also certain actions which are in substance and under all circumstances unjust (an *intrinsic malum*), which for this reason must never be done, and which cannot be judged as sometimes good in a purely teleological approach of weighing good versus bad effects of actions.

In the debate between Socrates and Gorgias, for example, in which the question is whether rhetoric can never be used to do wrong, as Gorgias claims. In numerous other passages in the Platonic dialogues, such as when Socrates speaks of the unjust acts that the Athenian government orders ordered him to commit and which he refused to carry out, this question or insight is at stake. This Socratic insight finds its most perfect expression in the *Crito*, where, among other things, the question arises as to whether one may do wrong to someone if one has previously suffered wrong from him, which Socrates resolutely rejects. Every kind of revenge in which a person or people from whom he had experienced Injustice is wronged out of a thirst for revenge is in itself bad

A further insight developed by Plato's Socrates is also closely related to these three and is developed in detail by Plato in his treatment of the myth of the Ring of Gyges: Justice is also to be done when (as through the invisible ring of Gyges) one's own Injustice has no directly experienced social or political negative consequences for the unjust person, and it may therefore remain incomprehensible to the crowd why someone should refrain from Injustice and evil under such circumstances - in a social space or context in which no earthly punishments or consequences are to be feared. However, only this can be the true justice: remaining just under such circumstances, as Glaucon and Adeimantus argue in their powerful speech, which ties in with the legend of the Ring of Gyges. Their speech culminates in the appeal to Socrates:

... Show us, then, in your speech not only that justice is better than injustice, but to what end each one makes the one who has it, in and for himself, whether or not it remains hidden from gods and men, the one good and the other bad.

The absoluteness of the morally good (justice) also includes the metaphysical insight into the character of the morally good as pure perfection, i.e., as a quality whose possession is, in an unrestricted sense, better than its non-possession, for whatever reason. Therefore, it is impossible that God could stand beyond good and evil, contrary to what most Greek myths about the gods imply. In the Second Book of the *Politeia* and many other places, Plato states that the absoluteness of the character of moral good and evil absolutely excludes the truth of any religion that attributes unjust acts to God or the gods. The insight into the metaphysical character of good and evil as the ultimate primordial pair of opposites, of which only the good can exist in the divine nature, refutes religions that attribute moral offenses to the gods as false. The same insight that in the absolute sense, it is better to be just than to lack justice. Also gives a philosophical-rational foundation to Plato's eschatology in the Judgement of the Dead in its moral-metaphysical core, even if such eschatological knowledge is also open to myth and faith in many respects, i.e., a field into which pure philosophical reason cannot penetrate, as Álvaro Vallejo has rightly emphasized. However, let us examine this last point more closely.

## II. On the Eschatological Dimension of Ethics

### A. *The relationship between wrongdoing and punishment*

Socrates starts in many places from the realization that wrongdoing objectively deserves suffering. Yes, even the death penalty carried out on Socrates would then, but only then, be a just punishment, a just suffering, if he had really become seriously guilty, in which case he would also have been justly punished. However, since he had not done the Athenians an injustice, but on the contrary, had rendered a high service to them, he was not to be punished, but rewarded - for example, by lifelong feeding in the prytaneion, as the Olympic winners received it. For he had truly done the Athenians a much higher service than the Olympic winners. Therefore, his suffering of death and punishment is an injustice and not the suffering of just punishment, even if they escape from this unjust but legally imposed punishment would again be a new injustice, as Socrates impressively demonstrates in the *Crito*.

One could conclude from the rational ethical insights of Socrates into the relationship of good and evil to reward and punishment, which led him to the thesis that not only wrongdoing is a greater evil than suffering Injustice, but that unpunished Injustice is the greatest evil of all, that there is a purely rationally accessible core of the Platonic eschatology of the judgment of the dead.

For Plato teaches on the one hand - and admires Anaxagoras precisely in this - that the good is the innermost principle and the innermost *causa finalis* (*telos*) of

reality, and that the world is ordered according to the good, which Plato substantiates in detail in *Politeia* 2, 5 to 7, and in *Timaeus*, and in which Aristotle also follows him. On the other hand, Plato sees in unpunished evil the greatest evil of all. But that this greatest of all evils exists, although it demands punishment, is not compatible with the rule of good in the cosmos and a world determined by goodness. If, therefore, the cosmos is truly ruled by good, which Plato considers evident for many reasons, the eschatological reward of the good and the punishment of evil must take place. Therefore, this core of Platonic eschatology belongs to the unconditional stock of the Platonic doctrine of the extreme evil of doing wrong. As Plato himself points out, this does not apply to the details of the eschatological myth he is recounting, but rather to the core of the eschatology of the Platonic myths of the judgment of the dead. Their clear general content thus belongs to the center of Plato's metaphysical interpretation of ethics.

We have pursued the exact meaning of the Socratic thesis that and why the  $\alpha\delta\iota\kappa\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$  is not only in itself but also for the wrongdoer, a greater evil than the suffering of Injustice, the  $\alpha\delta\iota\kappa\epsilon\acute{\iota}\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$ , even as the suffering of the most terrible tortures. For this thesis, Socrates provides a series of subtle and essential arguments, which he presents dramatically and dialectically in a chain of dialectical steps of thought and a methodical refutation of the counter-theses and arguments of his three opponents in the discussion. It is astonishing that an exact analysis of this most important ethical Socratic thesis (with a few exceptions) is hardly ever carried out in the current Plato discussion. Even in the most important recent historical works on Plato, it seems to occur only marginally.

As a partial correction for such neglect of a deeper investigation of the central Socratic ethical theses we are analyzing and their rational justifications, we should first present the precise content of the Socratic theses and secondly the Socratic arguments for their truth. In doing so, a philosophical-phenomenological-historical method of Plato's interpretation should be applied in the full sense, a method which Plato himself used in the interpretation and analysis of the opinions of the interlocutors: Only through the insight into the facts seen by Socrates and the grasping of the logical validity of his arguments, as well as through a series of philosophical distinctions, can the authentic meaning. At the same time, the truth of his thesis and the whole dialogue be understood.

The content of the Socratic thesis was developed in particular by Gorg. 469 b turns out to be an assertion that doing wrong is not only in itself a greater unworthiness than suffering Injustice, which is obvious to every ethically conscious thinker, even if the careful substantiation of this thesis is difficult, but that it is also a greater evil for the wrongdoer himself to do wrong than for the wrongdoer to suffer Injustice. Furthermore, this is so in the first place precisely because Injustice (moral evil), as a moral evil, is in itself more shameful, ugly, and unworthier than suffering Injustice, and not because of the punishment that will follow wrongdoing.

This original Socratic justification of the thesis that moral evil, because it is in itself more unworthy than any suffering, however terrible, is also a greater evil for the

soul of the wrongdoer, leads Socrates to his assertion, which absolutely shocks his discussion partners, that unpunished wrongdoing is the worst of all evils. Thus, Socrates breaks through the justification of his thesis, which is still plausible to the sophists, that ἀδικεῖν is a greater evil than ἀδικεῖσθαι: namely, its possible justification from the unpleasant and painful consequences of human wrongdoing through an immortal existence after death, which makes suffering after death possible. Socrates, however, justifies his thesis quite differently: out of the care for the soul, which is also taken up by Jan Patočka as a central Socratic idea, not as care for its freedom from suffering, but for its being as good and just as possible.

Socrates also derives his shocking thesis that unpunished evil is the greatest evil not only from the fact that this evil will be followed by punishment after death and that only the 'atonement' of the just punishment can cleanse man from his guilt. Certainly, the Platonic Socrates defends the purifying effect of punishment, especially of the just punishment of the other world, but he does not in any way use this either to substantiate his thesis that unpunished evil is the ultimate evil. Indeed, Socrates even asserts that eternal torment and punishment is even better for the incurably evil one than the extinction of his existence or even as the unpunished eternal conscious state, because even the irreversible evildoer, who cannot be purified by righteous punishment and therefore cannot atone for his guilt because of his unfathomable wickedness, which does not accept righteous punishment, can only gain a share in the eternal beauty of good and righteousness through righteous punishment.

This radical renunciation of any eudemonistic substantiation of his thesis and its exclusively deontological and moral proof represents one of Socrates' most significant contributions to purely philosophical ethics, which it seemed desirable to explore more closely than has been done so far, especially since a large number of interpreters - because they do not understand the subtle Socratic insights and arguments in a purely systematic-philosophical way - miss the core of his teaching, even if they apply a historical-hermeneutic method as precisely as it is done.

Curtis N. Johnson, for example, argues that Polos could easily have avoided the Socratic refutation and self-contradiction in which Socrates engages him in conversation if he had not admitted some Socratic assumptions which Curtis considers arbitrary assertions of Socrates and did not recognize them as genuine ethical insights, which, moreover, even the most depraved person must admit at some point.

Other authors treat the argumentation for Socrates' thesis that it is better to suffer Injustice than to do Injustice, in its form in *Crito*, as an argument based purely on a consistency theory of ethics and coherence theory of truth. In the light of the results of our analyses, such and other interpretations prove to be partly incorrect, partly quite inadequate to do justice to the subtlety and depth of ethical thinking as we encounter in Gorgias and other Platonic dialogues in which the same Socratic thesis is defended. Moreover, more recent Plato research leaves this central Socratic ethical thesis largely on the side, and for this reason, it seemed necessary to turn our full attention to it. The purpose of these remarks, however, was not only to work out the actual core of

Socratic ethical ideas but also the truth of his great insights, which represent both a beginning and a culmination of Western ethics.

At the beginning of Book II of Plato's *State*, the fundamental problem is raised whether justice is good in itself and Injustice is evil in itself, or whether they are only so in terms of their consequences. Glaucon and *Adeimantus* try to show that in most ethical discussions, the value of justice and the evil of Injustice in itself are completely overlooked. Rather, only their manifestations and consequences are considered. The two interlocutors of Socrates thus pose precisely the question that will move us in the face of contemporary purely teleological ethics.

However, they pose this question from a special perspective. They ask whether the criminal acts of Gyges remain criminal and are evil in themselves, even though Gyges possesses a magic ring that hides them entirely from the eyes of the world while he commits all kinds of crimes. However, wouldn't Gyges' deeds remain evil even if neither humans nor gods could recognize their wickedness, and if he appeared to humans as well as to gods as righteous and was praised for his apparent justice? This question concerns, first of all, appearance versus being of the moral act and the moral value of the person. However, this is directly connected with the question of the effects of the act. These are not at all directly connected with the moral being of the person but depend on the one hand on the purely causal structure of the world, so that the best and the worst man can produce the same effect by their good or evil deeds, and are on the other hand more connected with appearance than with the being of the moral act. The good appearance which a hypocrite and liar give himself can often produce the effects of a good example just as much as the moral goodness of the person himself. This is true, at least in the case of Gyges, where appearances are perfect.

Gyges is thus the borderline and test case of purely consequentialist ethics. For here, we have a criminal whose life - if we disregard the immediate effects of some of his crimes - has the same good effects as the best life. And conversely, with Kant's foundation of the metaphysics of morals, we can assume a man whose actions, with the best of intentions, produce nothing but disaster. Wouldn't the good consequences of the life of a man like Gyges, who would be considered a model of virtue in public, prove the positive value of his life? Or could it be said that despite countless good consequences of his actions in public and private life, even despite the best effects of his "model" on the morality of Greek youth, his murderous deeds, adulteries, lies, and other misdeeds remained evil in themselves and deserved rejection and rebuke?

Glaucon and Adeimantus raise a similar question: If the life of the most righteous of all human beings was to be misjudged by the public and therefore all kinds of bad effects were caused by the false manifestations of the actions of the righteous man, if these actions further had unintended bad consequences both for himself and for his fellow men, who in the end would hate and crucify him, indeed, if his supposed bad example were to harm the citizens of the state, and so, despite his best and most righteous intentions, innumerable evils were to come out of his life as consequences - would his virtues and deeds nevertheless remain good and deserve praise for their

intrinsic value? Or would they share in the evil of their bad consequences? Let Plato himself take the floor here:

Glaukon: To the perfect unrighteous man, then, we must assign the perfect injustice and take nothing away from it, but allow him to acquire the reputation of the greatest justice in the greatest injustices he commits ...

Now that we have determined this one in this way, we want in our contemplation to place the righteous man beside him, a simple and noble man, who - to paraphrase Aeschylus - does not want to seem good, but wants to be good. So, we must take away his appearance. For, if he seems righteous, honors and gifts are bestowed upon him because he stands in this respect, and it would then be uncertain whether he is so for the sake of justice or because of the gifts and honors.

We must therefore strip him of everything but justice, and show him in a position where he is justly opposed to the former; while he does not commit any injustice, he is to stand in the reputation of the greatest injustice, so that he has thus passed the test in his justice, not allowing himself to be touched by the bad reputation and its consequences. Let him remain immutable unto death; throughout his whole life he shall seem unjust, but be just ...

But when they stand before us like this, I think it is no longer difficult to describe the life that awaits each of them. This is to be done now; and if I lay a little thick on this, then suppose that it is not I, Socrates, who speak, but those who praise injustice more than justice. They will say, then, that if the righteous man is so disposed, they will beat him and torture him and imprison him; they will burn out his eyes and crucify him at last after all these maltreatments. And then he will come to the realization that one should not strive to be just, but to seem just ...

The one who seems righteous can first of all rule in the city, then he finds a wife from whichever house he wants, and gives his daughters to whom he wants, makes contact and converse with whomever he wants, and moreover he procures for himself advantage and profit, because he doesn't mind committing injustice ...

Adeimantus: Of all of you, marvelous one, who claim to be the praisers of justice, from the heroes of old, as far as their words are preserved, to the men of today, not a single one of you has ever rebuked injustice and praised justice for any other reason than because of the good reputation and the honors and gifts that result from it. But what significance the two have in themselves in the soul of the one in whom they dwell, hidden from gods and men, no one has yet convincingly demonstrated, either in verse or in ordinary speech: namely, that the one is the greatest evil that the soul contains within itself, justice, on the other hand, the greatest good. For, if you had all spoken thus from the beginning, and had taught us this conviction from a young age, then we would not have to seek to protect one another from committing any wrong, but each one would be his own guard, for fear that the greatest evil would stop at him when he did wrong...



Despite their shocking content, which hardly anyone shares, the stunning ethical insights expressed in the Socratic dictum and the even more astonishing Socratic reasoning and conclusions contain evidential insights of truth which are completely independent of whether the majority of people agree with them or not. The evidence of these insights is entirely independent of the question of a possible or de facto unattainable consensus on them.

Here a paradox applies: although the majority of people will never agree with these Socratic insights, they are nevertheless evident and can become evident to everyone. The ethical insights of Socrates become clear in *Gorgias* to all three sophistic interlocutors of Socrates, and even to the most ethically corrupt but consistent one of the three, Callicles, but also to each of us, in the course of their thorough discussion their truth, the ultimate insight that leads to them and their inner logic. These are thus insights which, on the one hand, almost no man will ever share but which, on the other hand, are nevertheless of irresistible evidence when approached with an open mind.

*B. On the contrary: unpunished Injustice is the greatest evil not only in itself but also for man – not only for the person who will be purified by accepting due punishment but even for the incurably wicked person*

Perhaps even this provocative Socratic proposition could still be understood if Socrates had offered for his thesis exclusively the reasoning that just punishment was the only way in which the evil one, who had not profited from the primary purifying power of virtue but had sinned, could be purified from his wrongdoing and his guilt could be morally healed; and that the purification of the wrongdoer could take place only through the suffering of punishment. Indeed, according to Plato, the purifying power of punishment, by which alone the evil-doer can be freed from his wickedness, constitutes a main sense of punishment and forms the main reason that unpunished wrongdoing is a greater evil for a man than the punished one. For this reason, Plato teaches that we should never help our friends or parents or our own children escape just punishment, but rather urge that they receive it, since only in this way can they be cleansed of their guilt. In light of this Socratic-Platonic thesis, it would be an act of enmity to want to save someone from his well-deserved punishment.

However, this answer of Socrates, that unpunished Injustice is a greater evil than punished one because only through punishment can the soul be purified, applies only to those offenders who are purified by punishment. These are, according to Socrates, not the only evil ones, but there are, according to him, also irreversibly and incurably evil men and women. Therefore, the reference to the purification of the soul by punishment is by no means the only answer of the Platonic Socrates to the question of why ἀδικεῖν, the doing wrong, is not only in itself but also for the wrongdoer, a greater evil than the suffering of Injustice, the ἀδικεῖσθαι and why, between punished and unpunished Injustice, the latter is the greater evil.

The main reason Socrates gives for this is not the expiating and purifying effect of punishment, but even in the case of an incurably evil person, who does not

participate in the purifying power of punishment and suffers eternally, it would be a greater evil not to be punished than to suffer punishment. And this is not only better in itself from the viewpoint of pure justice being done, but even *for* the wrongdoer, who has inflicted the ugliness of moral evil upon his soul.

One can certainly interpret the surprising Socratic position in *Gorgias* in such a way that even in this case, in which the punishment does not improve the incurably evil soul, the unpunished wrongdoing is a greater evil for his soul than the punished one. In other words, even if the punishment for wrongdoing were eternal damnation, it would be better not only in itself but also for the eternally suffering person to be justly punished than to escape just punishment, such that the wrongdoing of the incurably evil person would never be punished and never followed by any punitive evil.

*C. Even the incurably evil person who is not purified or converted to the good by being punished can come into contact with the light of the good, beauty, and truth: If his Injustice remained unpunished, he would remain in the mud and darkness of his wickedness without any contact with truth, with the just and the beautiful!*

Why? It is only at this point that we encounter the whole genius of the Socratic-Platonic answer, which is founded in a direct insight into a state of affairs that cannot be traced back any further, namely, that moral evil, because of its shameful ugliness surpasses in evilness all suffering. Therefore, moral evil is the greatest of all evils, just as moral value has primacy over all other values. Therefore, even if Plato himself assumes that in the Tartarus (in hell) and the incurably evil one, filled with extreme “moral malice, “must endure terrible suffering of punishment, which does not lead to his improvement in all eternity, unpunished wrongdoing is still a greater evil for man than to be justly punished.

But why? Because the qualities and values of actions toward a man’s soul correspond exactly to those of his suffering. If you strike someone hard, he will be stricken hard; if you cut a deep wound, he suffers a deep wound, etc. Therefore, just as the justice of punishing justly is beautiful, so is the justice of suffering a just punishment beautiful. It is therefore also better for man that his Injustice be punished, because just as in imposing and carrying out just punishment, justice is beautiful, the value of administering just punishment is matched by a strictly corresponding value and beauty of suffering just punishment! Thus, the Platonic Socrates gives a further explanation for his thesis that unpunished wrongdoing is the greatest evil in itself and for man, which would apply even in the case where the wrongdoer cannot be purified, because he does not repent of his guilt, but remains incomplete obduracy in evil. We can freely render the core of this Socratic thesis as follows: Even the incurably evil person who is not purified or converted to the good by being punished can come into contact with the light of the good, beauty, and truth, as well as with the justice present in the just punishment, through suffering just punishment, though not profiting from its purifying power.

In other words, even the incurable evildoer “profits,” albeit in a purely external and passive, even terrible way, from just punishment. For, if his Injustice remained unpunished, he would have to remain stuck entirely, as it were, in the mud and darkness of his wickedness and sink into it, without any contact with truth, with the just and beautiful! On the other hand, if he is justly punished, he possesses the only form of contact with the value of justice accessible to him. It is the only manner attainable to him to live in the truth and the light of the good. This Socratic insight presupposes a more general ‘law’: that every action and each of its values corresponds to an exactly parallel suffering: if you strike something hard, it is struck hard; if you cut it fast or deep, it is cut fast or deep, etc. However, this thesis, despite its obviously true core, has to be examined carefully and has to be read in the light of other Platonic texts.

If one looks at the examples of Plato, the Platonic Socrates seems to consider his thesis of the exact correspondence between action and passion chiefly by means of an example belonging to the personal world, namely the qualities of an acting person in relation to the qualities in the person affected by this action.

Plato seems to intend to illustrate these relations between the quality of a just action of person A and the personal sufferings of person B by the less personal example of cutting and being cut! However, we must not be simply content with this illustration from the physical world, but have to explore this crucial point of Socrates’ argumentation and methodological approach more deeply as to its truth and to the question of whether Plato offers a correct or misleading analogy:

(1) First of all, there is often an exact correspondence between the qualities of action and those of a corresponding passion only when the same person acts and suffers. The Injustice and cruelty of a soldier, for example, corresponds to a passive becoming unjust of the soul of the unjust actor. However, this kind of exact correspondence between action and passion is by no means found in the case in which agent and enduring subject are two different persons. There we do not find the same qualities in the behavior of a soldier and the suffering victim. Rather, the unjust agent himself suffers Injustice in his soul, not his victim, who suffers unjustly and through no fault of his own. Likewise, the brutality and Injustice, with which a soldier beats his victim, does not at all correspond to the brutality and Injustice of the person of the victim, who may rather be an innocent victim of culpable malice and neither becomes brutal nor unjust by being brutally and unjustly punished. The parallelism here refers only to the purely physical aspects of human actions, not to conscious personal life.

(2) There is, morally speaking, no “exact correspondence” between an acting and a suffering person. The cutting-being cut example of Socrates has a completely different character. If one directs one’s mental eye to the relation between the personal action of person A and a passion of person B, one sees: It is in no way the same beauty and value of the action of a just judge that is found in the acts of the person who suffers just punishment. Even if the culprit accepts the justice of his punishment like Raskolnikov in Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, the value of his act is more that of humility and atonement than that of justice. Moreover, if he

rebels within himself against the just punishment, his acts bear no value at all but disvalue. The value of suffering justly is purely objective and independent of the subjects who suffer it, reaction. Perhaps the difference between the correspondence of two personal acts and the “cutting-being cut” example is more obvious still when a corrupt and evil judge imposes an unjust punishment. In that case, there may exist a sublime value in the acts of the person who suffers unjustly, like Socrates, and a terrible disvalue in the personal acts of the judge and in the unjust punishment itself. In this way, the horrible disvalue in Pilate’s action of cowardly handing Jesus, of whose innocence he is convinced, over to be crucified, and the brutal acts of the torturers of Christ form a radical opposition to the sublime value of Christ’s passion. There is no comparison or analogy but utter dissimilarity between them.

(3) Therefore, even in the case that Socrates has in mind, the justice of the acts of the punishing person by no means corresponds to justice in the suffering of the punished person. Especially in the case of incurable Injustice, which is mentioned several times in Gorgias and other Platonic texts, the justly punished person does not automatically and always share in the justice of the person who punishes him and in the justice of his action. Nevertheless, here too, there is an exact relationship between the actions and a person’s suffering. However, we find here a different personalistic correspondence between imposing a just penalty and suffering it. But the kind of correspondence here has little in common with the all too physical image of cutting and being cut. We stand here in front of a quite different and much more complex correspondence, at which Socrates is ultimately pointing.

*D. Why is unpunished moral evil the greatest evil for the soul – even for the incurably evil person? those who do wrong can only share Injustice and beauty through suffering just punishment*

We can freely render the core of the actual Socratic insight into the correspondence of action and suffering here as follows: Even the incurable evil person, who is not purified by punishment nor converted to the good, can come into contact with the light of the good and of justice, though not with its purifying power. In other words, even the incurable evildoer “profits,” albeit in a purely external and passive, even terrible way, from just punishment. For, if his Injustice remained unpunished, he would remain stuck entirely, as it were, in the mud and darkness of his wickedness and sink into it, without any contact with the just and beautiful! On the other hand, if he is justly punished, the incurably evil person or the person who freely misses being “cured by suffering a just punishment” possesses the only form of contact with the value of justice accessible to him.

Socrates’ statement that it is better to be punished not only in itself but even *for* the incurably evil person than to be simply annihilated or never to have existed seems even more revolutionary and incomprehensible than the words of Jesus Christ, who says of the traitor Judas that it would have been better for this man never to have been born. Socrates, on the other hand, seems to think that it is not this, never to have been born or to be annihilated, but to endure just punishment, that is better for

the evil one than to remain unpunished or to escape from his punishment by fleeing from it or by an imaginable “destruction through death,” of which Socrates says in the *Apology* and even more clearly in *Phaedo* that such a form of escape from one’s just punishment by fleeing from it or by avoidance through one’s imagined destruction through death is neither beautiful nor possible.

Perhaps the apparent contradiction between these statements of Jesus and Plato can be resolved or overcome if these two sayings only emphasize different aspects of the one truth: namely, that from the pure experience of endless terrible sufferings on the part of those who suffer them, it would be preferable never to have been born, but that, once born, from a higher and ultimate metaphysical point of view it is still better to relate to the good and the true even in the most terrible punishment than simply to stand outside the world of truth and justice by being annihilated.

Such compatibility of the two statements seems all the more easily possible since Plato does not define the good of just punishment, conceived from the image of cutting and being cut, as a benefit. Rather, he says expressly that the incurably evil man is no longer benefited by his being punished but is only a deterrent example for others and that it would be better for the incurably evil man not to live than to live. The first thought that the incurably evil person no longer benefits from his punishment because it does not purify him is found in the following text from the Socratic final thoughts of Gorgias and the explanations of the myth:

Come now before the judge, and that is the one from Asia

S524e before Rhadamanthys: so Rhadamanthys puts it before him and looks at each soul without knowing whose it is, but often, when he has the great king before him or other kings or princes, he finds nothing healthy in the soul, but whipped he finds it and full of calluses of

S525a Perjury and injustice, and as just as everyone’s manner of acting is expressed in the soul, and finds everything twisted by lies and arrogance and nothing straight about it, because it grew up without truth, but before all violence and weakness, exuberance and immoderateness in acting also the soul shows itself full of disproportion and ugliness. If he has now seen such a one, he sends her dishonorlessly straight to prison, where she will endure what is coming to her.

This, however, is due to everyone who has fallen into punishment, who is punished by another in the right way, either to become better himself and have advantage of it, or that he gives to the rest, for example, so that others who see him suffer what he suffers may become better out of fear. But they are those who benefit themselves, that they may be punished by gods and men, those who have passed away through curable offences. Nevertheless, however, they gain this advantage only through pain and torment here as well as in the underworld; for it is not possible otherwise to be rid of injustice.

S525c But those who have transgressed the utmost and have become incurable through such transgressions, from these the examples are set, and they themselves have no more use of them, since they are incurable; but to others it is useful, who see how these, for the sake of their transgressions, endure the worst, most painful and terrible evils for eternity, obviously set up as examples there in the underworld, in prison, to all transgressors as they arrive, for show and for warning. 525d

The second thought, which is almost identical to Jesus' saying that it would be better for an incurably evil person not to be born, is expressed in the following text:

If this now seems to you to be of little consequence, then I will

S511d a greater one than they call it, the art of navigation, which saves not only life, but also body and property at the same time from the extreme dangers, ... but he who is afflicted with great and incurable evils of the soul, which is worth so much more than the body, [could] be well off to live on, and he has procured for him a benefit, if he can take him, no matter whether from the sea, or in court, or wherever else anybody

S512b; but he knows that it is not better for such a miserable man to live at all, because he must live badly. Therefore, it is also not brought here that the skipper is very proud whether he keeps us alive at once.

In the following, purely philosophical reflections on the foundations of ethics will be developed within the framework of a critical examination of ethical utilitarianism or consequentialism, which measures the value of a moral act or at least its moral correctness exclusively according to its consequences.