

## SOCRATES' GROUND FOR BELIEVING IN ABSOLUTE TRUTH

*CRITO* 46B4-49D5

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*"My uncle is King of Denmark, and those that would make mouths at him while my father liv'd, give twenty, forty, fifty, a hundred ducats a-piece for his picture in little. 'Sblood, there is something in this more than natural, if philosophy could find it out."*

*--Hamlet II, ii, 363-366*

In this article I argue that in the *Crito* Plato is showing us the ground for his belief in absolute truth, as Socrates defeats Protagorean relativism and shows that one of the most basic of the traditional values of Athens is absolutely bad. He also shows us that the first principle of the argument that defeats that traditional value is the same as the first principle for the radical teaching of *Apology* 28b3-d5 that we should never act with ulterior motive, but only think of whether or not we are acting justly. This first principle, the claim that we can ruin our souls by acting unjustly, is thus the Archimedean point for Socrates' philosophy.

### 1. Contra Protagorean Relativism (46b4-48a11)

In his speech at 45a6-46a8 *Crito* presents Socrates with a number of points of view that make running away from jail sound good. Just as some television commercials follow up points of view that make their product sound good by urging the viewer to call immediately because supplies are limited, *Crito* follows up the points of view that he has been presenting by saying:

Come, consider, or rather it is time not to consider any longer, but to have finished considering. There is no alternative; the whole thing must be carried through during this coming night. If we lose any more time, it can't be done; it will be too late" (46a4-7).

If you give your audience time to think things over, the emotions you induce with the points of view you have presented before them will gradually dissipate. You need to get them to make a decision while they are still under the influence of those emotions.<sup>1</sup>

Socrates replies to Crito by saying that, because he never accepts advice unless it is the best course that reason offers, he will continue to honor the old arguments he has advanced in the past, no matter with what terrors Crito might try to frighten him. He describes what Crito has been doing as being like someone frightening children with goblins—obviously referring to the various negative points of view that Crito has just presented before him.

Socrates also says that he is not going to abandon the principles he has held in the past simply because his current circumstances have now occurred to him (46b4-c5).<sup>2</sup> In *All's Well that Ends Well* Shakespeare writes:

Helen: You go so much backward when you fight.

Paroles: That's for advantage.

Helen: So is running away when fear proposes the safety (I, i, 200-203).

When a coward runs from battle, the coward would be thinking that the safety that his fear is proposing is more to his advantage than all the reasons he had had previously for standing his ground and fighting. He does not stop and think about the old reasons; he merely rejects them out of hand. Socrates would be doing the same sort of thing if he were to let Crito's argument make him reject his old considerations without further thought.

Rather than discussing the specific principles that would be abandoned if he were to follow Crito's advice, Socrates considers one of the points of view in favor of running away that Crito has just presented before him: the many would think ill of Crito and his friends if Socrates were not to run away (45e1-

<sup>1</sup> Lane thinks that Crito is seriously proposing deliberation when he says "consider", but then backs down because he is not willing to stand up to the demands of deliberation (p. 317). But there is no time interval between the first sentiment and the second, so it is more natural to read this as another of Crito's rhetorical tricks.

<sup>2</sup> Bertman is mistaken in thinking that Socrates refuses to escape because he wants to maintain rational consistency (p. 576). The point is that Socrates' commitment to do what seems best to him prevents him from losing his orientation and forgetting about what had seemed best to him in the past. Rather than blindly following previous conclusions, Socrates is explicitly interested in whether better arguments can now be advanced (46c2-3).

McNeil thinks that Socrates is appealing to solidarity with the group that had the original discussions (p. 128). It is true that Socrates reveres the old arguments, but he does so because "they seem to me much the same as ever" (46b7-c1). He reveres them because of their nature—because they seem to be good arguments—not for the sake of Polemarchean loyalty.

46a2). He asks whether or not it is true that "some of the opinions held by men ought to be esteemed and other opinions held by men ought not to be esteemed" (46d9-e2). Just because people will think ill of you, Crito, that does not mean we should esteem their opinions.

Socrates' question seems unproblematic enough. Who would say that all opinions are to be esteemed, that no one's opinion can be dismissed as being unworthy to be held in esteem? Protagoras, that is who. His doctrine that man is the measure of all things means that the way things seem to you is the way they are. If the room seems warm to you it is warm, and if it seems cold to you it is cold; no one can say that you are wrong. For Protagoras that is true of all opinions; all truth is relative (the skeptics' doctrine that it *seems* to them that there is no absolute truth avoids an implicit contradiction). All opinions can be estimable only if there is no absolute standard to which to hold them. Thus in considering their old argument that all opinions are not equally estimable, Socrates is considering his grounds for believing in absolute truth.

After Socrates asks Crito if he thinks that it is correct that some opinions are more estimable than others, he adds, "for you, humanly speaking, are not involved in the necessity of dying tomorrow, and therefore present conditions would not lead your judgment astray" (46e3-47a2). But, of course, the mere fact that Crito is not facing imminent death does not mean that he is perfectly objective. In particular, we have just seen that one of Crito's reasons for why Socrates should run away is that he is worried about what people will think about him and his friends. He has a different fear that is proposing the safety of having Socrates run away, and Socrates is ironically referring to that fear.<sup>3</sup> He was actually trying to convey that fear to Socrates with the points of view he presented in his speech. Note the manifest absurdity of Crito trying to get Socrates to run away because of what people will think of *Crito*. Not only is Crito so concerned with what the many think of him that it is what he thinks about it as his friend faces imminent death, but he even thinks *his friend* ought to let such considerations guide his actions.

Socrates proceeds to offer the following argument against Protagorean relativism.

<sup>3</sup> Adam sees that there is "a touch of irony" in Socrates' remark (p. 44); Gary Young sees the irony (p. 8); and Gergel sees the heavy irony (p. 292).

Rosen thinks that the point is that Crito is so devoted to Socrates that it is as if he himself were going to die (p. 309), but Crito is essentially concerned with maintaining his and his friends' *reputation*. For Crito the preservation of Socrates' life is merely a means to that end.

1. If a man is an athlete, he ought not to pay attention to every man's praise and blame, but only to the coach's. Nor should he fear the praise and blame of the many (47b1-3) [as Crito is doing in the matter of Socrates running away].<sup>4</sup>
2. He will come to harm if he regards the words of the many and disobeys the coach's words (47c1-4).<sup>5</sup>
3. Then, Crito (not Socrates) says that the harm is committed upon the man's body, which the harm ruins (47c1-8). (Socrates response to this strange claim is ambiguous; he merely says, "Well said.")
4. There is something within us which we used to say is benefited by justice and destroyed by injustice (47d3-5).<sup>6</sup>
5. In matters of justice and injustice, the disgraceful and the noble, and good and bad, if we follow and fear the opinion of the many [as Crito has been doing] rather than follow and fear the opinion of the one who knows—if there is a person who knows—then we will harm this inner thing that is benefited by justice and destroyed by injustice (47c8-d7).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Missing the hypothetical nature of this sentence, Kraut holds that Socrates is saying that it is rational to seek expert medical advice (*Socrates and the State*, p. 38n). But Socrates is merely talking about what people should do *if* they are athletes and make that their business. Strauss makes the same mistake (p. 58).

<sup>5</sup> Brickhouse and Smith are in contradiction with this passage when they claim, "Socrates is not denying that the advice of the many about how best to train might coincide with that of the physical trainer and so the advice of the many might happen to be right" (*Routledge Philosophy Guidebook*, p. 206).

<sup>6</sup> Blyth writes "It is certainly not an immortal soul if it can be destroyed by injustice" (p. 64). But there is more than one possible meaning of the destruction of the soul. For example those people who are excluded from consideration at *Apology* 28b5-c1, i.e., people who are not good for the least thing, might have destroyed their souls with injustice and thereby prevented themselves from being able to perform with virtue.

<sup>7</sup> Vlastos claims that this passage implies that Socrates has the knowledge of the moral expert, for "if he did not believe *he* knows what he says *they* know, his saying that they do [know] would be a fraud" (*Socratic Studies*, p. 48). This is incorrect: in addition to the fact that Socrates is explicitly noncommittal to the existence of such moral experts, he does not say that he knows what advice a moral expert would give. All that he is committed to is the benevolence of moral experts, if they do, in fact, exist—i.e., that they would want to give good advice. For example I could be confident that a benevolent expert coach would give good advice about physical training, even though I do not know what that advice might be.

Grote is similarly mistaken when he suggests that Socrates assumes the expert's role (p. 388).

Bostock is correct when he writes: "It would be distinctly odd, to say the least, if we are supposed to take Socrates as here implying that he himself is the moral expert, since everywhere else in Plato's dialogues he is consistently portrayed as *disclaiming* this status. (p. 19).

6. Crito (not Socrates) takes the stand that life is not worth living when the body is ruined (47e3-5).<sup>8</sup>
7. That within us which is benefited by justice and destroyed by injustice is much more important than the body (47e7-48a1).
8. Life is not worth living with that destroyed which is benefited by justice and destroyed by injustice (47e6-7).<sup>9</sup>

Zeyl (p. 233), Yaffe (p. 130), Vlastos ("Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge," p. 11), and Parry (p. 12) miss the caveat, "if there is a person who knows," when they claim that Socrates is indicating that there are men with the knowledge of justice and injustice.

Kraut is similarly mistaken when he claims: "The political implications of the passage are clear ... Political power should not be distributed to all alike, but should be restricted to those who know" ("Socrates and Democracy," p. 40).

Wolz holds that Socrates thinks that there is no such moral expert, because he takes Socrates to be a relativist (p. 37).

When Foucault claims that it is false opinion per se that causes the corruption of the soul (quoted in Nehamas, *The Art of Living*, p. 159), he misses the significance of the fact that the corruption is said to come from *following and fearing* the opinion of the many.

<sup>8</sup> Walton (p. 297), Irwin ("Socrates the Epicurean?" p. 213), Charles M. Young (p. 14), Santas (p. 249), and Brickhouse & Smith ("Socrates on Goods, Virtue, and Happiness," p. 16; *Plato's Socrates*, p. 115) are mistaken in taking this passage as a definite assertion that life with a ruined body would not be worth living. McPherran sees Socrates as merely *suggesting* this to Crito with a leading question (p. 237).

Brickhouse & Smith defend their view against the criticism that Socrates is only asking questions by saying: "Socrates indicates that he has endorsed this very piece of reasoning before, and hence, that he himself agrees with Crito's answers," and they cite *Crito* 46b6-c1, where Socrates talks of not abandoning the arguments he had formerly found to be convincing (*Plato's Socrates*, p. 201n). But all the specific references to what they used to say (47a13, 47d3-5, 48d4-6, and 49a5-b3) have to do with how we harm our souls—rather than with how we harm our bodies. References to ruining our bodies could merely be Socrates' way of impressing upon Crito the seriousness of the old arguments that we can harm our souls: if he can see that ruining our bodies would be very bad, then that could help him see how bad it would be to ruin our souls (see 47e7-48b1 and *Republic* 445a6-b3).

Vlastos, thinking that knowledge is required for virtue, feels that the ruined physical state would be one in which the mental processes would be so incapacitated that one could no longer have knowledge (*Socrates, Ironist, and Moral Philosopher*, p. 218n). But Socrates leaves quite undetermined what he considers to constitute a ruined body. He seems to take it for granted that Crito or anyone else would have a feeling for the importance of bodily wellbeing. Indeed, at *Apology* 30a7-b2 Socrates represents most people as being primarily concerned with the state of their bodies and their property. Such people would think that a devastating disease would amount to the roof crashing down upon them and as being something to be avoided at all costs. Crito is clearly thinking on such a nontechnical level. Furthermore, it is hard to imagine how bad advice about how an athlete should train would cause so much physical harm that it would incapacitate the athlete's mental processes. Note also that Socrates is not necessarily in agreement with Crito's answer.

9. We should not consider what the many say about justice and injustice, etc. [as Crito has been doing], but only what one who knows about these things would say and what the truth herself would say (48a5-10).<sup>10</sup>

10. And then this would imply [though it goes unstated] that all opinions are not equally estimable.

The argument seems unnecessarily long and complicated. The point against Protagoras is proven as soon as it is granted that the athlete should not listen to every opinion (the coach's opinion is more estimable than the many's). Moreover it is hard to imagine advice about training that is so bad that it ruins one's body and makes one's life not worth living. The idea that *any* bad advice about training would do so is preposterous.<sup>11</sup> Nor is it needed in the argument; you don't need the point that it is bad to ruin your body to establish that it is bad to ruin your soul. The comparison with ruining the body would merely seem to be a way of bringing home to Crito the importance of what is at stake when one ruins one's soul. Socrates is trying to help him see the significance of making his life not worth living: think what your life would be like if your body were ruined; it would be even worse if your *soul* were ruined. The same move is made at *Republic* 445a6-b3:

People think that all the luxury and wealth and power in the world cannot make life worth living when the bodily constitution is going to rack and ruin; and are we to believe that, when the very principle whereby we live is deranged and corrupted, life will be worth living so long as a man can do as he will, and wills to do anything rather than to free himself from vice and wrongdoing and to win justice and virtue?

Because the argument here in the *Crito* is couched in terms that apply to Crito's situation, Socrates is clearly implying that Crito is harming something within himself as he fears the blame of the many about an issue of justice and in-

<sup>9</sup> Vlastos sees that what makes life not worth living, for Socrates, is the forfeiture of virtue (*Socratic Studies*, p. 72).

<sup>10</sup> Bostock is incorrect when he writes of this passage: "The *method* that Socrates suggests, for the proper consideration of the question before us, is that we should *consult the moral expert*" (p. 19). Socrates is explicitly not committed to the existence of such an expert, for he says "if there is anyone who knows about such things" (47d2). When he says that we should be concerned with what the moral expert would think of us, it is another way to phrase the teaching of *Apology* 28b5-c1: we should think of nothing except whether or not we are acting as a just person would act. Barker sees that the moral expert's blame is to be feared not for its own sake, but only because it implies that we have done something unjust (p. 23).

<sup>11</sup> Weiss sees that it is unlikely that the body would be ruined (p. 64).

justice. The way in which he would harm his soul with injustice is indicated by *Republic* 485d6-8: "We surely know that when a man's desires set strongly in one direction, in every other channel they flow more feebly, like a stream diverted into another bed." Socrates is here treating as unproblematic the principle that when we feel passion for something a channel in our soul gets deeper, and we have a greater tendency to have future passion flow down that channel again, rather than down a different channel. That is, we develop predispositions to desire certain types of objects, and the more we reinforce these predispositions the more they tend to dominate our lives.<sup>12</sup> For example, when Dickens' Scrooge was a young man he was interested in many different things, but the predisposition to care about money that he eventually built up came to dominate his life. This phenomenon would explain why Socrates warns Crito that wrongly directed passion can make things more difficult to deal with (46b1-3);<sup>13</sup> his wrongly directed passion for what the many think of him makes his predisposition to care about them all the greater.

Socrates is recalling *what they used to say* against the idea that all opinions are equally estimable (i.e., against Protagorean relativism) (46d9-e2). The one point in the argument where he actually refers to what they used to say occurs when he discusses "that which we used to say is benefited by justice and ruined by injustice" (47d3-5). Socrates is not merely talking about what would be bad if one happens to have a desire to be an athlete; his old argument against relativism was clearly grounded on an understanding of how people generally can ruin their souls. If injustice ruins my soul, then it is obvious that not every opinion is equally estimable, for some opinions could cause me to act unjustly and thereby harm, perhaps even ruin, my soul. If an opinion can harm my soul to the extent that it

<sup>12</sup> Mahoney offers the following explanation of how we harm ourselves with injustice: "To harm someone is to inflict something bad on the person. Since reason desires the good of everything and anything, such an action is contrary to reason's desire and, as a result, a harm to oneself" (p. 279n). But why should it harm me in particular that reason does not get what it (supposedly) desires? There would seem to be much in the world that is other than reason would desire, and yet most of these things do not seem to have much of an impact upon me personally.

Scott thinks that, because the superficial issues in the vicinity of 485d only deal with justice in a perfunctory way, Plato could not "be described as actually revisiting the conclusion of Book IV to support it further" (pp. 8-9). But we should not presuppose a limitation to Plato's artistry *a priori*.

<sup>13</sup> West thinks that Socrates is commending Crito's passion rather than passion in general (p. 74). But Socrates adds, "if it should prove rightly directed." That is, he is merely commending rightly directed passion in general, and might actually be in the process of condemning Crito's passion (which I have been arguing he has, in fact, been doing).

makes my life not worth living, then it is not an estimable opinion. (This is virtue ethics.)

The clear implication is that Crito's fear of the many, with which he has tried to sway Socrates, is not an estimable opinion, because it poses a danger to the souls of Socrates and Crito. Indeed, Crito's soul has built up such a predisposition to care about what the many think of him that it dominates his thoughts even as his friend and teacher faces execution.

## 2. Crito Is Not Persuaded (48a10-b6)

After completing the argument, Socrates seems to call it into question by saying, "But it might, of course, be said that the many could put us to death" (48a10-11). As Gilbert Rose observes, Crito seems comical as he embraces this possibility with enthusiasm, affirming it thrice in quick succession.<sup>14</sup> He very much wants to sway Socrates, and it must have been seeming more and more hopeless to him; so he is now glad for some support for his side. That he thinks that the fact that the many could put us to death is relevant to Socrates' argument shows that there is something about the argument that he does not understand. What would that be, reader?

If your life is not worth living after you have ruined your soul, it doesn't matter if they can put you to death or not. Zero take away zero is zero; there is no loss.

Socrates responds by saying that the fact that the many can put them to death (the point which he himself has just raised) does not affect his argument (48b2-4). Crito had tried to win Socrates over with a sophistic speech in which he presented a series of points of view that make running away sound good. Socrates has tried to counter this with an argument from a first principle, viz., the principle that we can ruin our souls by acting unjustly. He has now brought up a point of view that makes Crito's case sound good, but which is not relevant to the argument that he has just presented. The point seems to be that, while the Sophistic method makes your position sound good, it does not really get you anywhere. The only meaningful ways to deal with Socrates' argument are to find a false premise or to find a problem with his logic.

Socrates' explanation to Crito of why this point does not affect his argument merely involves establishing that living well is more important than simply living (48b4-6). Thus, rather than showing that Crito's point is totally ir-

<sup>14</sup> Rose, p. 30. Burnet sees that Crito's threefold answer suggests his eagerness to catch at any straw (p. 194).

relevant—because it ignores the key fact that we can make our lives meaningless with bad predispositions—he merely shows that the fact that the many can kill them is not decisive. Your concern is not sufficient, Crito; instead of worrying about how to avoid shortening life, you ought to be worrying about something more important, about how to live life well.<sup>15</sup> Socrates' real concern is to get Crito to change what he cares about, for, as he said in the *Apology*, "I go about doing nothing else than urging you ... not to care for your persons or your property more than for the perfection of your souls, or even so much" (30a7-b2). He is trying to get Crito to care more about his soul than he does about his reputation.

## 3. Socrates Derives the Teaching of *Apology* 28b5-d9 (*Crito* 48b8-d5)

Socrates next gets Crito to agree that living well and living justly are the same thing (48b8-9). Alexander Nehamas is mistaken in claiming that the idea that injustice is wrong was quite conventional and non-controversial.<sup>16</sup> Thrasymachus is not the first person to think that it is foolish not to cheat on your taxes, etc. (see *Republic* 343c1-e7). Indeed, Glaucon says that Thrasymachus' arguments are dinned into his ears by innumerable other people (*Republic* 358c7-8). What would be unconventional would not be "thinking that you should not be unjust"; no, the unconventional thing would be 'thinking that you should not maintain the *appearance* of being just' (see *Protagoras* 323b5-9).

It has already been established that living unjustly would ruin one's soul, and it is clear that one would not live well with a ruined soul. But the equivalence of living justly and living well implies that living justly is not merely a necessary con-

<sup>15</sup> Greenberg thinks that the choice "not life but the good life" is absurd, because one cannot have good life without life (p. 58). But it is not a question of choosing one at the expense of the other; it is a question of which one is "more important" (48b5-6). Which one should be our object of desire? Cf. *Apology* 30a7-b2: "I go about doing nothing but urging you ... not to care for your persons or your property *more* than for the perfection of your souls."

McNeil is mistaken when he claims that this is the first place in the dialogue where the idea is presented that living well is what is important rather than merely living (pp. 83-84). This idea was present when Socrates claimed that life is not worth living with a ruined soul (47e6-7).

<sup>16</sup> Nehamas, "Socratic Intellectualism," p. 312, and *Virtues of Authenticity*, p. 47.

Demos is similarly incorrect in holding that Plato takes the identity of living well and living justly to be self-evident (p. 126). The ostensible purpose of the *Republic* is to determine whether or not this identity is true. Thrasymachus, Glaucon, and Adeimantus all have meaningful objections to urge against it (Kraut sees this [*Socrates and the State*, p. 27n]). Perhaps I should not always worry about doing the just thing; perhaps I sometimes need to look out for myself and mine; perhaps the principle of *Apology* 28b5-c1 that we should never think about anything but acting justly is too unrealistic.

dition for living well, but also a sufficient condition.<sup>17</sup> An answer to Thrasymachus would require something like the principle of *Apology* 30b3-5 that “from virtue comes money and all other good things to man, both to the individual and the state,” for otherwise the virtuous person might not have access to the means that are required to do well (such as sufficient food).<sup>18</sup> Crito’s failure to raise an objec-

<sup>17</sup> Vlastos sees that whether living well is the same as living justly is dependent upon whether living justly makes one happy, saying, “for all Greek moralists, the good for man is happiness” (“Happiness and Virtue in Socrates’ Moral Theory,” p. 193).

<sup>18</sup> Burnet (p. 124), noting the seeming contradiction with Socrates’ poverty that Socrates mentioned at 23b9 (followed by Blakeney [p. 135], Vlastos [*Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, p. 219], Clay [*Platonic Questions*, p. 194], Gomez-Lobo [p. 86], Hobbs [p. 181], and Strauss [p. 45]) sees *agathá* as a predicate at 32b3-5. Thus, for example, Vlastos renders the passage as follows: “For virtue does not come from wealth, but through virtue, wealth and everything else, private and public, becomes good for men.” *Everything* becomes good? Nothing is bad or merely neutral? Not even insects in the food supply? Surely what Vlastos really has in mind is that everything *good* becomes good through virtue. This is the view of Schanz (p. 170), Cron and Uhle (p. 73), Williamson (p. 85), Brickhouse & Smith (“Socrates on Goods, Virtue, and Happiness,” p. 7), A. E. Taylor (*Plato: The Man and His Work*, p. 165), and John Hammond Taylor (p. 49). But if *agathá* is to be taken as a predicate, Vlastos’s impossible rendering of the passage is what the text requires.

Irwin decides against Vlastos by virtue of the parallel with the first part of the sentence (“Socrates the Epicurean?” p. 218n27, and also *Plato’s Ethics*, p. 363n22): the natural way to read the sentence would be ‘Virtue does not come from money, but money comes from virtue’, rather than ‘virtue does not come from money, but virtue makes money good’. Bruell sees that “both the immediate and the broader context speak against” Vlastos’ reading (p. 150).

John Hammond Taylor also sees the unnaturalness of reading Plato’s sentence this way, but (following Stallbaum [p. 117] and William Smith [p. 136]) feels that taking the passage in the natural way seems to contradict what Socrates has just said: while Socrates has just reprimanded people for caring about acquiring money, he now seems to be commending virtue as a means of acquiring money. Burnyeat (“The Virtues in Action,” p. 20) followed by Vlastos (*Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, p. 220) similarly feels that this would make Socrates recommend virtue as a money-maker. Irwin says that that implication makes Socrates’ claim “hard to understand” (*Plato’s Ethics*, p. 58).

I read the passage as follows: Make your priority be X rather than Y, for Y does not come from X, but X comes from Y. (There is a parallel—albeit ridiculously false—formulation at *Republic* 403d2-5: “I do not believe that a sound body by its virtue makes the soul good, but on the contrary that a good soul by its virtue makes the body be the best that it possibly can be.”) You do not have to worry about the practical; pursue virtue and then the practical will be taken care of, even though you neglect it. If you follow worldly wisdom and let money, etc. be your priority, you will lose out on virtue, but if you make virtue your priority, you will not lose out on the money, etc., that you need.

Burnyeat thought that the wealth in question would not be money, in light of “the Socratic challenge to common notions of what is a valuable” (p. 210). Brickhouse & Smith are correct when they reply to Burnyeat by pointing out that the fact, that it has just been established that people put too much emphasis on the well-being of their bodies and their material possessions

tion here is a failure to properly play the role of the answerer in the Socratic method of short questions and answers.

From the identity of living well and living justly Socrates derives the teaching of the *Apology* 28b5-d9 that we should not consider anything but whether or not we are acting unjustly: because living well is more important than merely living, “we ought not consider whether we must die if we stay here and keep quiet or whether we must endure anything else whatsoever, but only the question of doing injustice” (*Crito* 48d3-5).<sup>19</sup>

(29d7-e3), makes it natural to read ‘wealth’ here as referring to material things (*Plato’s Socrates*, pp. 107-108). It is the same wealth the pursuit of which people were to feel ashamed at 29d7-e3.

Burnyeat has subsequently changed his view and defends Burnet’s construal by claiming that it is confirmed by 41c-d: “To a good man nothing bad happens either in life or in death, nor are his affairs uncared for by god” (“The Impiety of Socrates,” p. 7n). That is, he mistakes a sufficient condition at 41c-d—being a good man—for a necessary condition; he takes 41c-d as implying that *nothing* good happens to those who have not acquired virtue. (Thus virtue would make [at least some] things good.)

When Burnet and Gomez-Lobo cite Socrates’ poverty in support of their way of reading the passage, they are mistakenly presuming that Socrates is saying that a *superfluity* of money (real money) will come from virtue. Socrates and his family did not have a superfluity of money, but they *did* get by, even though Socrates was not maintained at public expense, which is something he explicitly claims he needs (36e1). Because he did not look after his own affairs (23b7-9, 31b1-3), he needed someone to send his way the material things of which he was in need. Socrates uses the word ‘money’ in more than one sense in the *Apology*. At 37c4 he first says that he has no money, but then at 38b2-4 he says: “I have no money, unless you are willing to impose a fine which I could pay. I might perhaps pay a mina of silver.” In one sense of the word Socrates has no money and in the other sense he does. He does not have *real* money, but he does have a mina. There is real money and then there is the sort of money Socrates actually had. The money that could come from virtue would have to be the sort of money that the virtuous Socrates actually had.

Irwin’s understanding of virtue as the superordinate craft leads him to interpret this passage as implying that, once you understand what to strive for, you will secure the things for which you should strive (*Plato’s Moral Theory*, p. 93). But, of course, one might also be lacking in the subordinate knowledge of how to obtain these things or lacking in other necessary conditions for obtaining them (such as tools or raw materials). Thus Irwin must be mistaken in saying that the point of this passage is merely “that virtue is the superordinate craft.” His interpretation would require the additional thought that there is some agency making sure that one will have access to the necessary conditions for attaining to the goals that are suggested to one by the superordinate craft.

Gooch sees that “whether it turns out well with the good man who seeks not his own advantage but to do the right thing—that may be left to the god” (p. 195). But he also makes Burnyeat’s mistake of thinking that Socrates is saying that goodness is a necessary condition for receiving good things: “only where goodness is realized will other and lesser benefits follow in its train” (p. 195).

Finally, the fact that Socrates’ argument in the *Crito* requires my understanding of *Apology* 30b3-5, is a very strong point in favor of my understanding.

<sup>19</sup> Stephens sees the connection with *Apology* 28b (p. 3).

#### 4. The Socratic Method (48e5-49a2)

Socrates next instructs Crito in the proper way of responding to an argument: see whether or not the beginning of the argument satisfies you, and then evaluate each step along the way (48e5-49a2). The latter task will be facilitated by the fact that all of Socrates' subsequent steps will be in the form of questions.

Socrates is presenting an alternative to the Sophistic method of persuasion, the method of presenting points of view that make one's case sound good. The same contrast can be found a *Republic* 348a7-b4, where Socrates disparages the Sophistic method, saying:

We might answer Thrasyamachus' case in a set speech of our own, drawing up a corresponding list of the advantages of justice; he would then have the right to reply, and we should make our final rejoinder; but after that we should have to count up and measure the advantages on each list, and we should need a jury to decide between us.

On the other hand, following the Socratic method, "We each secure the agreement of the other side, and we can combine the functions of advocate and judge" (348b2-4). The Socratic method is decisive, while the Sophistic method is not. That is why Crito needed Socrates to make up his mind while Socrates was still under the influence of the emotions Crito hoped he had induced in Socrates.

#### 5. The Argument Against Revenge (49a4-d2)

In presenting the first principle for a new argument, Socrates again appeals to what they used to say (49a6-7). The previous principle from the old days to which Socrates appealed was the principle that justice benefits the soul and injustice ruins the soul, and his new first principle is merely less specific: injustice is always an evil and a disgrace to the person who commits it. From this it follows immedi-

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Missing the fact that *nothing but* (48d5) the question of committing injustice is to be considered, Vlastos thinks that other factors might also be taken into consideration (*Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, pp. 214-218). (Brickhouse & Smith make the same sort of mistake [*Routledge Philosophy Guidebook*, pp. 209-210].) He uses the example of someone choosing not to sleep in a filthy bed. But if Socrates responds naturally to the situation before him, without any calculation about what will be to his advantage, he will still not lie in the filth.

Teloh sees living justly as being instrumental for examining one's life (injustice "discourages the give and take of *logoi*"), and thus one should not commit an injustice because the unexamined life is not worth living (p. 98), rather than seeing examining one's life as being instrumental to living a just life and an unjust life being the thing that makes one's life not worth living.

ately that we should never do an injustice in return for an injustice (49b9-10)<sup>20</sup>—not because it is bad for the other person but because it is bad for ourselves. (Again, we can see that Socrates is espousing virtue ethics.)

Socrates next needs to guard against a possible objection from Polemarchus' team-player morality of helping our friends and harming our enemies. Because someone like Polemarchus would think that we are acting justly when we try to do bad things to our enemies (*Republic* 332b), Socrates needs the premise that doing bad things to someone is the same as treating them unjustly (49c7-8).<sup>21</sup> While Polemarchus might find fault with this premise, Crito lets it pass. (Again, Crito fails to properly play the role of answerer in the Socratic method.) And now it follows that it is never right to do bad things in retaliation, contrary to the belief of 'the many' [and of Polemarchus] (49c4-6). Thus it would always be wrong to take revenge, for when we take revenge we feel that someone has done something bad to us and we want to pay our enemy back in kind.

Of all the stories that established the values of the Athenian culture, the most important were the stories of Homer. The *Iliad* is the story of the *revenge* of Achilles. Thus Socrates is here striking down a fundamental value of the city of Athens. He urges Crito to be careful in agreeing, for there are few (the opposite of many) who believe or who will ever believe that it is wrong to requite bad things with bad things (49c11-d2). If Crito easily agrees to something that goes against the basic teachings of his culture, that is a sign that he has not really been engaged by the argument.

#### 6. The Supposed Impossibility of Common Ground (49d2-5)

What is wrong with Socrates' next claim, reader? "Those who believe in the badness of revenge, and those who do not, have no common ground of discussion, but must necessarily, in view of their opinions, despise one another" (49d2-

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<sup>20</sup> McPherran is mistaken in thinking that Socrates is saying we should forego revenge for the sake of the intellectual pleasure of doing the just thing (p. 109). Socrates' argument rests on the principle that injustice is an evil and a disgrace to the person who commits it; foregoing revenge is not a matter of aesthetics.

<sup>21</sup> Missing this, Weiss thinks that Socrates needs the premise that doing bad things to people is the same as treating them unjustly to exclude some things which are conventionally considered bad things (things that are painful and unpleasant but are intended to be beneficial) from the category of "bad things." This is incorrect, because Socrates is saying that being a bad thing is sufficient to make an action unjust, not vice versa. Because he has already established that we should not act unjustly, he simply needs to establish the injustice of revenge in order to show that we should not seek vengeance.

5).<sup>22</sup> It is true that Mercutio despises Romeo for not seeking revenge when Romeo is insulted by Tybalt. He says, "O come, dishonourable, vile submission!" (*Romeo and Juliet* III, i, 76). But would a Jesus, who did not believe in seeking revenge, despise a Mercutio? The mere fact, that you can find no common ground with someone, does not mean that you will necessarily despise that person—you might despise what the person does, but that does not mean that you despise *the person*.<sup>23</sup> We do not have to fall into that Polemarchean team-player mentality that sees people in terms of being friends or enemies.

What else is wrong with that claim, reader? Is it really true that there is no common ground by means of which those who believe in the goodness of requiting bad things with bad things and those that do not believe in it can resolve their differences? What sort of common ground could we possibly find? Perhaps it would be helpful if people understood that, when they allow themselves to act unjustly, they can build up predispositions that can ruin their souls. Socrates has explicitly accentuated the fact that the starting point of his argument against revenge was that we should never act unjustly (49a5-6). But that principle was the result of the more basic principle that unjust action can ruin one's soul.

That is, after making an explicit issue of his starting point Socrates says that there is no starting point from which to prove his conclusion. It is as if Socrates is testing us to see if we have been paying attention. Our job is to think dialectically; we need to see how what is being said at the present point is related to previous steps of the argument. Otherwise we do not get beyond the level of the Sophists, and merely have one point of view in a contest of competing points of view. Thus Plato is indirectly illustrating the difference between the Socratic method and the method of the Sophists. But he is also drawing attention to the fact that he does indeed believe he can establish the badness of seeking vengeance on the basis of the principle that acting unjustly harms our souls. He is saying that *this* is my common ground on the basis of which I can defeat a basic value of your culture; *this* is a way to establish absolute truth. (In order to truly prove that revenge is unjust, Socrates needs (1) to defeat Polemarchus' understanding of justice by establishing the premise of *Republic* 335d3-8 that "it is no more the function of goodness to harm than

<sup>22</sup> Grote is confusing epistemology with metaphysics in seeing Socrates' statement as being Protagorean (p. 305). Lack of ability to find common ground does not imply the absence of absolute truth—it might simply be the case that human beings are not capable of apprehending absolute truth (cf. *Apology* 20d9-e2).

<sup>23</sup> Weiss's justification for Socrates' claim, that Crito and Socrates despise each other's *counsels* (p. 62), is not to the point. They clearly do not despise each other.

heat to cool or dryness to produce moisture," and (2) to answer Thrasymachus by establishing that from virtue comes money and all other good things for people. Here in the *Crito* he merely succeeds in getting Crito to agree with him.)

## 7. Conclusion

Socrates defeats Protagorean relativism by appealing to their previously established principle that justice improves our souls and injustice destroys our souls (47d3-5). It is obvious that Crito does not really see the connection with this principle, for, when Socrates presents a point of view, that is made meaningless by it and that goes against the conclusion that we should not care about the opinion of the many, Crito jumps to embrace it. Socrates then appeals to essentially the same first principle, accentuating the fact that he is doing so, in order to attack the Athenian traditional value of the goodness of taking revenge—establishing that taking revenge is absolutely bad. He then pretends that he would not be able to argue with people who disagreed with him, because he would have no common ground from which to begin an argument. The fact that the philosophical tradition has not realized that he has just showed us his common ground shows that it has not understood his argument any better than Crito understood Socrates' first argument.

How are people from two different cultures—let us say our culture and a culture that believes in the goodness of female circumcision—to find any common ground? The other culture might perhaps defend itself by talking about the importance of ensuring virginity, and we might argue that losing the ability to experience sexual pleasure is not worth ensuring virginity. But their culture's values would have some internal consistency: from the point of view of their culture it *would be* worth it. The only way in which we could find common ground would be if we could argue that the practice fulfilled or violated human nature, for human nature would be the one thing that we have in common. The imperative can follow from the indicative. As Socrates shows us in the *Crito*, if the indicative says that a certain opinion can ruin your soul and make your life not worth living, then you had better not let yourself be of that opinion.

At *Apology* 28b5-c1 Socrates claims without justification that we should only think about whether or not we are acting justly, that we should never have any ulterior motive for what we do. Surely many people would quickly lose their jobs if they followed this principle. Why do I have to be such a goody-goody, why can I *never* look out for number one? There is a psychologi-

cal principle—Socrates' way of life is thus grounded in human nature—that says you are in danger of ruining your soul, if you allow yourself to feel passion for ulterior motives. In these pages in the *Crito* Socrates is emphasizing that this is his first principle: he is saying that this is what allows him to defeat Protagorean relativism; and he is saying that this is what would allow him to show that a culture is *wrong* if it thinks that it is good to get revenge (provided that objection from Polemarchus can be resolved and provided that it is established that from virtue comes money and all other good things for people). Here is my ground for believing in absolute truth: injustice ruins the soul. Thus the psychological principle that explains why injustice ruins one's soul would be the ultimate foundation of Socrates' moral philosophy. Thus Socrates' ultimate foundation is *Republic* 485d6-8: "We surely know that when a man's desires set strongly in one direction, in every other channel they flow more feebly, like a stream diverted into another bed."

You don't want to end up like Crito and care about what other people are thinking about you at the very time your friend and teacher is about to be executed. You don't want to be out of control. Well, then, you had better limit your desires to doing what is just.

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