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JUSTICE BETWEEN MERCY AND REVENGE IN SOPHOCLES' *ANTIGONE* AND PLATO'S *CRITO*

ABSTRACT: Plato's *Crito* and Sophocles' *Antigone* challenge the concept of justice as "benefitting friends and harming enemies": justice stems from anger and harms the soul. The *Antigone* first illustrates how violence results from people's actions when they see themselves as the agents of justice; second, it points to a possible reassessment of justice as benefitting all, regardless of what others do to you. In the *Crito*, Socrates shows how this new notion of justice, which is very similar to mercy, is consistent with the life of a good human being.

RÉSUMÉ: Le *Criton* de Platon et l'*Antigone* de Sophocle mettent en question la notion de justice qu'on trouve dans le monde grec: "faire du bien à ses amis, faire du mal à des ennemis". Selon cette définition, la justice provient de la colère et fait du mal à l'âme. *Antigone* montre d'abord que la violence est le résultat des actions des gens quand ils se considèrent eux-mêmes comme les agents de la justice. En outre, cette pièce suggère une possible redéfinition de la justice, au sens de "faire du bien à tous, indépendamment de ce que les autres nous font". Dans le *Criton*, Socrate montre comment cette nouvelle notion de justice, très similaire à la pitié, est cohérente avec la vie de l'homme bon.

KEYWORDS: Justice; Mercy; Anger; Philosophy and Tragedy; Classical Studies

Justice and revenge have a long relationship, and Sophocles' *Antigone* and Plato's *Crito* show how connected they were in the ancient Greek world. This cannot come as a surprise since the idea of revenge is deeply rooted in human culture. Even today, people are often troubled when they witness others who do not react angrily and do not desire revenge when

persecuted.[1] The first lines of the *Antigone* and of the *Crito* display this inability to understand someone who does not desire to harm back one's abuser. Antigone becomes angry when her own sister Ismene refuses to join her in Antigone's attempt to act against the law of Thebes (69-99).[2] Crito is frustrated with Socrates' calmness while the latter is imprisoned waiting for his execution (43a-46b).[3] Antigone and Crito find it natural to harm their enemies when they were harmed, and they expect other people to have the same reaction. We can recognize here half of the definition of justice as it appears in the *Republic*, in the words of Polemarchus (332d).[4] It is just to take revenge, because you thus harm the people who have harmed you. However, the *Antigone* and the *Crito* also bring the germs of a new approach to justice: Sophocles and Plato suggest that justice is not the return of the equal, but rather the expression of acting beneficently to all, regardless of their actions. In Socrates' words from the *Crito*, "one should never do wrong in return, nor do any man harm, no matter what he may have done to you" (49c).

In the seventh century A.D., so more than a thousand years later, St. Isaac of Syria[5] had a similar approach. Defining justice as the return of the

[1] See M. Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016. She mentions the case of a journalist who reacts physically to a group of people who, when kicked savagely by the police, do not react: "I felt an indefinable sense of helpless rage and loathing, almost as much against the men who were submitting unresistingly to being beaten as against the police wielding the clubs" (p. 220). Nussbaum also discusses how responding to violence with lack of violence is often perceived as an unmanly act. This shows that people believe that, in order to be a real 'man' and thus maintain one's dignity, a person must show strength and fight against persecution. See also G. Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1991. Vlastos says that "when retaliation is the expected outcome to unjust aggression, failure to retaliate will be construed as weakness" (p. 186).

[2] For the *Antigone*, I use P. Meineck's and P. Woodruff's translation in Sophocles, *Theban Plays*, Indianapolis, Cambridge, Hackett Publishing House, 2003. At times, I offer my own translations, and I use the following Greek edition: H. Lloyd-Jones, N.G. Wilson, *Sophoclis fabulae*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990, p. 182-238.

Retrieved from: http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/Iris/Cite?0011:014:0.

[3] For *Crito*, I used G.M.A. Grube's translation, in Plato, *Complete Works*, edited by J. M. Cooper, Indianapolis-Cambridge, Hackett Publishing House, 1997.

[4] For a study of the Greek idea of justice, see M. W. Blundell, *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies: A Study in Sophocles and Greek Ethics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989. See also Vlastos, *Socrates*, and S. Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986. Godhill says, "An *ekhthros* [...] is the opposite of a *philos* – an 'enemy'. As much as *philos* implies positive ties and obligations, *ekhthros* implies equally binding requirements to be disobliging" (p. 83).

[5] Isaac of Syria, or Isaac the Syrian, also known as Isaac of Nineveh, lived during the seventh century, BC.

equal – a concise phrase that expresses the "benefit your friends, harm your enemies" view – Isaac of Syria claims that it has no place in a merciful heart, one that benefits all regardless of how people act.

> Mercy and justice in the same soul is like the man who worships God and idols in the same temple. Mercy is in contradiction with justice. Justice is the return of the equal because it returns to man that which he deserves and it does not bend to one side, neither is it partial in the retaliation. But mercy is sorrow that is moved by grace and bends to all with sympathy, and it does not return the harm to him who deserves it, although it overfills him who deserves good.[6]

The perspective of Isaac of Syria, who believes that mercy and justice are incompatible, may seem too strong. We may be tempted to say that the radical separation between these two notions can only be seen in Christianity, with its emphasis on mercy and forgiveness. Thus, we may say that such views have no relevance for understanding the world of the Greeks. However, the *Antigone* and the *Crito* also suggest that justice – benefitting friends and harming enemies – cannot belong to the soul of a good human being, who never returns evil and who does not harbor anger. Still, the Greeks' solution should not be confused with Christianity: they do not completely banish justice from a human soul. Instead, they redefine it. In the *Antigone*, Sophocles points out the connection between justice and emotions, especially anger. He also shows the consequences of acting according to justice and gives a possible alternative. In the *Crito*, Plato's Socrates also starts by pointing out the connection between justice and emotions. He then goes further and provides a new definition for justice, which is very similar to the notion of mercy that we find later in Isaac of Syria: do good to all, regardless of how they treat you.

Writing on Socrates' rejection of retaliation, Gregory Vlastos points out Socrates' radical change of the morality of his time. He believes that, among the few philosophers who do not take the morality into which they were born for granted, "Socrates is the greatest. Proceeding entirely from within the morality of his own time and place, he nevertheless finds reason to stigmatize as unjust one of its most venerable, best established, rules of justice".[7] Vlastos writes of the justice of retaliation, a rule of just repayment

[6] Isaac the Syrian, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, translated by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, 1984, p. 243-244.

[7] Vlastos, *Socrates*, p. 179.

for the suffering one experiences.[8] He points out that "the first Greek to grasp in full generality this simple and absolutely fundamental moral truth" that "*if someone has done a nasty thing to me this does not give me the slightest moral justification for doing the same nasty thing, or any nasty thing, to him*"[9] is Socrates. I propose that, while Socrates is the first to spell it out, we can witness the same idea being performed in a tragedy such as the *Antigone*.[10]

Sophocles' Antigone

The word φίλος, *friend*, and its derivatives appear nine times within the first 99 lines of the *Antigone*, the length of the dialogue between Antigone and her sister Ismene. At the same time, the word ἔχθρος, *enemy*, and its derivatives appear four times, always used by Antigone, who wants justice for her brother. The theme of justice as benefitting friends and harming enemies is emphasized from the first line, in which Antigone reminds Ismene of their communion. Their being together presupposes a relationship of love, philia, and interdependence. Ω κοινὸν αὐτάδελφον Ισμήνης κάρα (1), Antigone says, emphasizing to Ismene that they belong together, that they share the misfortune that came over them because of the shame that surrounds their father, Oedipus. In fact, Antigone's opening is a clarification of the status of their relationships: they are sisters, and since Antigone bases *philia* on blood relations, they are also friends.[11] The consequence of this is that they must have the same friends and enemies. To make things even clearer, she asks Ismene to declare her allegiance, to show where she stands οὕτως ἔχει σοι ταῦτα, καὶ δείξεις τάχα/εἴτ' εὐγενὴς πέφυκας εἴτ' ἐσθλῶν κακή (37-8).

Antigone's approach has shaped Ismene's reality. Thus, Ismene seems to have two options only: to be a friend and thus help Antigone burry her brother, just as justice requires, or to be not worthy of her birth, and thus place herself outside of the communion that Antigone had assumed. Ismene finds herself in a difficult predicament, since neither of the two options is in her advantage. Ismene recognizes the stubbornness of her

[8] See ibid., p. 180-190, for a detailed assessment of the notion of justice as retaliation in the works of Ancient Greek writers.

[9] Ibid., p. 190.

[10] Vlastos, acknowledges that "innovations in history don't come out of the blue" (ibid.), and so he points to examples in Greek literature that anticipate Socrates' perspective. He does not mention the *Antigone*. After discussing Sophocles' *Ajax*, though, Vlastos asks, "Has he seen that the *talio* is a fraud, its justice a delusion? To this we must reply that he has not even faced the question" (p. 194).

[11] See Goldhill, *Reading*, for the discussion of the meaning of *philia*.

sister, calls her on her stubbornness, ὦ σχετλία (47), and tells her what happens when someone makes mistakes, reminding her of their father.

The opening of the play, then, is a dialogue between two characters with different attitudes about a wrong they suffered. Antigone and Ismene have lost a brother, Polyneices. Creon decreed that his corpse should not be honored and be left on the battlefield. Justice triggers in Antigone the desire to help her own. Polycines is her brother, and even Ismene's brother, whether she likes it or not: τὸν γοῦν ἐμόν, καὶ τὸν σόν, ἢν σὺ μὴ θέλῃς,/ἀδελφόν· οὐ γὰρ δὴ προδοῦσ' ἁλώσομαι (45-6). Ismene is also called to act according to justice. Creon, Antigone continues, cannot separate her from what is hers (48). Ismene, however, has a different response. She acknowledges the harm, but she refuses to act against it, claiming that it is against her feminine nature to do so, even asking the dead for *σύγγνοια* (66), 'lenient judgment', perhaps 'mercy' or even 'forgiveness'.[12] In other words, she steps outside of the requirements imposed on her by justice.

Audiences are easily persuaded to side with Antigone, a woman who, because of a love for a brother, disobeys a law and makes herself an enemy of the city. The context, of course, is a bit more complicated. First, Polyneices, Antigone's and Ismene's brother, had fought against the city and thus become its enemy, even if he continues to be a friend for Antigone. Second, while considering her brother a friend, Antigone easily calls her sister an enemy from the beginning of the play, a quite surprising feature for someone who is often portrayed as a defender of love.

Let me say a few words about these two aspects. First, we see how justice depends on personal perspective. In Antigone's mind, she is required to bury her brother's corpse because it is just to do so: she benefits him who, by being a brother, is a friend. Furthermore, her action is right also because it harms Antigone's enemies: by deciding to leave Polyneices' body on the battlefield, Creon has become Antigone's enemy, and disobeying his law means harming him. In Creon's mind, however, he also acts according to justice. From the perspective of the state, Polyneices is an enemy because he attacked Thebes. It is thus just to punish him. Creon and Antigone, the two 'enemies' in Sophocles' play, share the same definition of justice, and none of them falter in applying it, even if both have the occasion to reconsider it when Haemon, Creon's son, and Ismene respectively talk to them. Their enmity does not stem from different

[12] Meineck's and Woodruff's translation render *σύγγνοια* as forgiveness: "Forgive me, I am held back by force" (p. 66).

definitions of justice, but rather from differences in judgment regarding friends and enemies.

Second, the difference between Antigone's attitudes towards her brother and sister is hard to explain[13] if we consider her a person who is true to her family, regardless of what they do. After Ismene refuses to help her, Antigone uses the words 'enemy' and 'justice': εἰ ταῦτα λέξεις, ἐχθαρῇ μὲν ἐξ ἐμοῦ, ἐχθρὰ δὲ τῷ θανόντι προσκείσῃ δίκῃ (93-4). Because of her answer, Ismene has become an enemy for her sister. But a blood relation is supposed to include a relation of *philia.* The relation between the two sisters brings forward a tension between friendship and enmity within family. In discussing Electra's concern about whether it is pious to pray for revenge in *Choephoroi*, Goldhill remarks that "it is in strife within the family that the possible tensions in the traditional moral position are most clearly seen. At what point can members of one's own family cease to be *philos*?"[14] The switch from *philos* to *ekhthros* takes place rapidly in the *Antigone*. A possible explanation of Antigone's treatment of her own sister as enemy is that, as Godlhill remarks in his analysis of *Oresteia*, "It is better to treat all, including your mother, as *ekhthros* rather than the gods".[15] Since Antigone believes that the gods command the proper burial of her brother, listening to them is preferable to maintaining *philia* for her sister.

This account, however, cannot fully explain the dialogue between the two sisters. Antigone can well maintain her opinion even if Ismene doesn't agree with her. Whether Ismene helps Antigone or not does not harm her sister's view. Antigone's immediate, thoughtless, and impulsive rejection of her sister must be determined by something more than an apparent disagreement between Ismene's attitude and the gods' desire. Goldhill remarks that in this scene, "it is as if Antigone is implying that even to disagree with her attitude towards a *philos* [in this case, Polyneices] is to make one an *ekhthros* (even though Ismene is a sister as much as Polyneices is a brother)".[16] I argue that Antigone's words are not only a seeming implication about how one can become her enemy, but they rather express her attitude towards those who disagree with her, regardless of the topic of

[13] See also Blundell's comments about this difference in *Helping*, p. 111-115.
[14] Goldhill, *Reading*, p. 84.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., p. 93.

disagreement. This is due to Antigone's self-reliance in matters having to do with understanding.

Goldhill writes about Antigone's self-reliance in a context in which, "in democratic Athens, an essential demand of the ideology of the city is the mutual interdependence of *citizens*".[17] This self-reliance makes her trust her own judgment and places her in the position to decide what is just and unjust for herself, but also for the others, a feature that brings her in company with Creon. Neither of them relies on others, but they rather expect those around them to comply to their own view of the world. Those who have a different perspective become their enemies.

In the particular case of the two sisters, Ismene harms Antigone by her refusal. Antigone had not perceived she was harmed in Polyneices' attack on the city, so he was never en enemy for her. When Ismene disagrees with her, though, the antagonism is direct: it is Antigone's desire that is disputed and also, perhaps, even the possibility of accomplishing her desire as well. Antigone did not come to Ismene to give her a chance to express her love for her brother, but she came because she needed help. Proper burial rites are not the affair of one person alone, especially when the corpse is guarded by soldiers. Furthermore, a stubborn person like Antigone – remember that Ismene has already pointed that out – wants her deed to be proclaimed. Even Ismene's silence about her action would harm her, so Antigone reminds her that if she does not speak about it, she would be more of an enemy (86-87). The difference in the attitudes Antigone has before her brother and sister do not show inconsistency in Antigone. On the contrary, she constantly applies justice by judging who is the enemy and who is the friend; this judgment is not in accordance with blood connections, but rather with ideological agreement. This suggests that the Greek notion of justice is reflexive and it is based on the agent's interests. One benefits friends and harms enemies because one loves oneself.

In Antigone's case, the above claim seems to contradict one of her most famous lines in the play. During the exchange with Creon, she notoriously says that she was born to share love, and not hatred (523). These words suggest that she is concerned with others, and that everything she does is for their benefit, and not for herself. Nevertheless, we need to understand this line in context. It is significant that Antigone's words appear just before her sister joins her on scene. It is as if Sophocles reminds his readers and spectators of how Antigone, who just claimed that her

[17] Ibid., p. 91.

nature is to love and not to hate, treated her own sister when she disagreed with her. In fact, Antigone continues to treat her sister the same way, even if the chorus introduces Ismene as someone who "sheds tears of sister-love". Ismene pleads with Antigone to not be despised (544), but she cannot overcome the wall raised between the two of them by the one who just claimed that her nature is to side with love. "I won't accept a friend who's only friends in words" (543), Antigone says, revealing that her nature is not to side with love, as she fools herself to believe, but rather with those whom she considers friends – those who agree with her.

The beginning of Sophocles' play shows us the potential dangers of the notion of justice. First, since it refers to the friends and the enemies of the agent, the decision about whether an action is right or wrong depends on the personal attitude of the agent toward different people. Second, and perhaps more important, its reflexivity makes the agents blind to the perspective of another. Whether an action is right or wrong can no longer be debated rationally because it inevitably arrives at a fight about one's 'true colors', or one's allegiances to friends. Since people have strong beliefs about their friends and enemies, it so happens that, whenever someone acts out of justice, he or she cannot be made aware of the irrationality of his or her attitude.

In the *Antigone*, the character who is similar to Antigone is, in fact, her enemy. At first sight, it seems that Sophocles establishes Creon as Antigone's counterpart. Creon denies everything Antigone believes. Their disagreement, however, rests in the application of their principles, not in the principles themselves. The king of Thebes takes for granted Antigone's definition of justice, benefitting friends and harming enemies. The difference results from his understanding of who his enemies and his friends are. Creon sees things simply: Polyneices attacked the city, thus he is an enemy. His conclusion is as certain as Antigone's: Polyneices must be punished by leaving his corpse to the dogs.

However, Creon's first speech, lines 155-210, seems to oppose the logic of friendship and to propose ruling the state on the principle of obeying the laws. He says that a leader is not good if he places family or friends before the state (182-183). We need to consider, though, Creon's position. He is not a philosopher who discusses moral views or criteria for good law-makers. He is the new leader of Thebes, the one who gives the laws of the city. It is his laws that take precedence over family and friends, not any laws. In fact, he shows that he has never abandoned the principle of

justice that requires to help friends and harm enemies. At the end of the speech, he clarifies what it means to be a friend: it is to be a friend of the city. For such a being, Creon is ready to "pay him full honor, in death or life" (210). He also warns the men of the chorus that their job is to not side with anyone who disobeys his laws (219). The Chorus understands Creon's words just as he meant them. Siding with someone who disobeys Creon's laws makes them his enemies, and this may lead to their death, the "reward" (221) for becoming Creon's opponents.

Throughout the play Creon shows that he upholds the view of justice that requires benefitting friends and harming enemies. When he speaks of what the gods prescribe for human beings, he agrees that one must always follow what the gods require, but he could not believe that they could care in any way about the corpse of an enemy (283-4). The gods themselves, Creon suggests, would not go against the principle of human justice. It is just to punish one's enemies. If one harms you, the friendship based on family connections is irrelevant. By attacking the city, Polyneices placed himself outside of friendship, and it is only just to punish him for that.

The comparison between Crito and Antigone may seem outstretched. The two of them could not be further apart in their actions: Crito accuses; Antigone loves and defends. The outcome, however, is different only because each one of them has a different understanding of that which is loved by the gods; while the actions are different, they have the same principle: the certainty concerning what the gods hold dear. In one case, the gods hold dear upholding the law. In the other case, the gods hold dear doing right by the dead.

So Creon thinks he *knows*, as Antigone does, what the gods love.[18] He also knows what justice means, benefitting friends and harming enemies, just as well as Antigone does. But he differs in his judgment about who should be considered a friend. There is one more feature that connects them: both of them want to impose their understanding of justice on others. Antigone pressures Ismene, and her sister's refusal angers her and makes Ismene her enemy: Creon asks that all follow his law, regardless of what they think of it. Antigone's refusal angers him and makes her his enemy. Sophocles does not present here a conflict between two ideas or two attitudes before the law, but rather between two people who identify themselves with the same idea of justice to the point in which they become

[18] See also another character in Plato's dialogues who 'knows' what the gods hold dear, Euthyphro.

its mere expression. Antigone is the being-in-act of justice: benefitting friends and harming enemies as expressed in Antigone. Creon is the being-in-act of justice: benefitting friends and harming enemies as expressed in Creon. In fact, two people who have the same definition of justice can be enemies because the definition of justice includes personal perspectives regarding friends and enemies.

When two people have the same definition of justice but have different friends and enemies, their dialogue is absurd. When Creon and Antigone have an exchange of words, none of them is interested in understanding the perspective of the other. Creon reminds Antigone that ἀλλ' ἴσθι τοι τὰ σκλήρ' ἄγαν φρονήματα πίπτειν μάλιστα (473-4) – a quite sensible thing to say, unless it was said by someone who himself is rigid. Even if both of them make arguments by appealing to the inflexibility of the laws of the city or of the gods, their inflexibility has become so in their respective minds. Creon and Antigone speak as if they do not hear one another.[19] In fact, they *cannot* hear one another, because they do not debate a theory. They agree with the theory: benefit your friends and harm your enemies. They think they debate justice, but they debate who they are – their perspective about friends and enemies. Thus, if they truly engaged in a genuine dialogue, they would need to be able to give up not a theory, but rather themselves – their own 'friends and enemies'. None of them do it, so the result is a dialogue of the absurd:

> ΚΡ. σὺ τοῦτο μούνη τῶνδε Καδμείων ὁρᾷς.
> ΑΝ. ὁρῶσι χοὗτοι· σοὶ δ' ὑπίλλουσι στόμα.
> ΚΡ. σὺ δ' οὐκ ἐπαιδῇ, τῶνδε χωρὶς εἰ φρονεῖς;
> ΑΝ. οὐδὲν γὰρ αἰσχρὸν τοὺς ὁμοσπλάγχνους σέβειν (508-511).

Antigone tells Creon that the people in Thebes think like her. As if he does not hear her, Creon continues his attacks by asking whether she is ashamed for having a different view than these people. Instead of just replying with, "I just told you that they do not have a mind apart from mine", Antigone applies shame to a different situation, having respect for a brother. But the discussion was about shame when one thinks differently than the community. Her deafness in regard to Creon's arguments is similar to his own deafness in regard to anyone else who has a different opinion than

[19] See also Blundell, *Helping*, who says, "The narrowness of both is revealed in their failure really to engage in argument" (p. 145). For similarities between Creon and Antigone, see also B. M. W. Knox, *The Heroic Temper. Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1964, especially p. 67-72.

him. Their arrogance is of the same nature, although different in its particulars. Creon and Antigone are both impatient and quick in judgment and in condemning others. They both become the absolute center of their own world, their own gods, and judge everything according to their views of the world, but this is explainable because they both start with a notion of justice that focuses on the individual's situation in life. Regardless of whether we sympathize with one and reject the other, their problems stem from the same *hamartia* – the trust that a human being places in one's own beliefs, a trust *required* by the notion of justice they have. They must believe they are right in regard to friends and enemies; otherwise, they would not be able to apply justice. The *Antigone* can be read as a performance of what happens when one misses the mark not in judgment (we can distinguish between Creon's love of hatred and Antigone's love of love and say that one is better than the other), but in establishing one's ideas as the mark itself. In such case, mercy is inevitably absent. People can no longer do good to all, regardless of how others may treat them, because their first commitment is to themselves, just as the notion of justice requires. You cannot love all others *and* act according to a theory that separates the world between friends and enemies.

There is one more significant encounter in the play that brings further evidence about the connection between justice and personal emotions. This is the dialogue between Creon and his son Haemon, who was also Antigone's fiancé. The conversation between the two underlines one particular aspect of justice, the separation among people as friends and enemies, and also suggests a possible alternative: inclusion.

The structure of their dialogue is similar to the one between the two sisters at the beginning of the play. There, Antigone established her friends and enemies from the first exchange: "Our enemies are on the march to hurt our friends" (10). In a similar fashion, Creon makes it clear to his son that they can be friends or enemies. Haemon could have come on behalf of his fiancée, so against the law and implicitly his father, or in friendship in every respect (631-634). Haemon professes his friendship to his father, just as Ismene did toward Antigone. His discourse is inclusive. He does not reject his father from the beginning, but he rather listens to him and encourages him to listen to others as well. It is good for one man to be born complete, Haemon says, but it usually turns out otherwise (721-722). If people were complete, then their judgment regarding friends and enemies would always be correct. But men do not have complete knowledge. Thus,

when someone thinks he is complete, he transforms himself into the very principle of justice.

Everything Haemon says stems out of love. His words and attitudes express his willingness to be with his father. πάτερ, σός εἰμι (635). "Father, I am yours". You may have made a mistake, he seems to say, but I am here for and with you. "My natural duty's to look out for you, spot any risk/That someone might find fault with what you say or do" (688-689).[20] Do not cut yourself from all others. I hear "how the entire city is grieving over the girl" (693). Do not make a decision solely on your understanding. "Don't always cling to the same disposition,[21]/Don't keep saying that this, and nothing else, is right./If a man believes that he alone has a sound mind,/And no one else can speak or think as well as he does,/Then, when people study him, they'll find an empty book" (705-709). If you make a decision based solely on your understanding, then you are alone; you cut yourself from the communion with others and you remain with yourself and your law, which is nothing but a reflection of yourself. Antigone runs the risk of dying, but there is another risk involved: Creon himself can die. Becoming an 'empty book' is nothing else than no longer being human. He may look like a human, walk like a human, but he would no longer be alive in his stiffness.

Creon does not listen to his son, and the separation continues. Haemon is angered himself and ends up committing suicide. But we have seen here the possibility of replacing justice with something else: an attitude of inclusion which no longer looks for one's benefits, but rather tries to understand another's views and interests.

Plato's Crito

Plato's dialogue opens with Crito's surprise at Socrates' peaceful sleep.[22] Socrates is rapidly approaching his own death, which brings about unrest for most people; but we should also remember that he is entitled, at least

[20] P. Meineck's and P. Woodruff's translation captures well the meaning of Haemon's and Creon's interactions, and so I chose to use it for the exchange between the two.

[21] Meineck and Woodruff, whose translation I used, choose to write 'anger' here. While the Greek text does not have anger, but ἦθος, so character, mood, or disposition, their choice is significant here, further emphasizing that the decisions about justice are, in fact, influenced by people's emotions.

[22] For a discussion on Crito's alleged 'emotional distraction,' see M. C. Stokes, *Dialectic in Action: An Examination of Plato's* Crito, Swansea, The Classical Press of Wales, 2005, p. 27-29.

from a human perspective, to be angry, for he has been wronged without having done anything bad. The laws of Athens, or at least their application, sent him to prison to wait for his execution. Socrates, however, remains calm;[23] the structure of the dialogue does not suggest that his calmness is the effect of a decision or that it comes out of rational calculation. Instead, as Crito says it, it seems to be the continuation of a state that is quite natural for Socrates: "Often in the past throughout my life, I have considered the way you live happy, and especially so now that you bear your present misfortune so easily and lightly" (43b).

It is at this moment that Plato provides an interesting dramatic element: Socrates' dream. He tells Crito that it was good to let him sleep because he could thus complete his dream: "a beautiful and comely woman dressed in white approached me. She called me and said: 'Socrates, may you arrive at fertile Phthia on the third day'" (44a-b). Both Crito and Socrates seem to understand the dream,[24] although no clear interpretation is provided in the text. The usual account is that Socrates believes that he would die, and so his soul would find its home, on the third day. In the context, this interpretation seems plausible. Crito believes that Socrates would be dying the second day, since his execution is scheduled the day after the ship from Delos returns. But Socrates believes that the timing for his death is not accurate and provides his dream as proof (43c-44b).

This Homeric line about the return to Phthia is charged, I propose, with more meaning. In Book 9 of the *Iliad*, it comes up at an important moment. Achilles had been harmed by Agamemnon, and his decision to go home is not a peaceful one. In fact, Achilles seems to be the type of character that feels at home on the battlefield, where he has made a name for himself and where he hopes to achieve immortality by remaining in the memory of his people. Now, he leaves Troy in anger. He has refused all gifts Agamemnon had sent to appease him, and he tells the messengers, "So report back to him everything I say,/And report it publicly[25] – get the

[23] See also S. Halliwell's discussion on "the virtuous man's annulment of suffering and grief" (p. 127) in Plato's dialogues. S. Halliwell, "Plato and Aristotle on Denial of Tragedy," in A. Laird (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Ancient Literary Criticism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006.

[24] Whether Crito and Socrates truly interpret the dream in the same way remains unclear. See Stokes' comments (n. 27 below) about the fact that Phthia is in Thessaly, where Crito believes that Socrates may want to move (45c).

[25] Achilles's desire to have this report made public mirrors Antigone's request to have her own deed public, when she tells Ismene she should not be silent about it, unless she wants to be more of an enemy to her.

Greeks angry,/In case the shameless bastard still thinks/He can steal us blind. He doesn't dare/Show his dogface here. Fine. I don't want/To have anything to do with him either./He cheated me, wronged me. Never again" (9.380-386).[26] The lines are in sharp contrast with Socrates' peacefulness. Achilles insults the one who wronged him, emphasizes Agamemnon's harm, and does what any Greek would do: harms back. He wants his answer to be reported publicly, so that all Greeks feel anger toward Agamemnon. Achilles knows that the Greeks understand justice as he does, and so they would agree that he is justified to be angry due to the harm he had received. In Achilles' case, to harm the commander of the Greek army means to refuse fighting for him, and his departure for Phthia stems from this feeling of anger. After all, the core of the *Iliad* is given by Achilles' anger, *menis*, the one that creates havoc in the Greek army and makes him desire to go back home.

It is at least surprising that Plato chooses to cite the *Iliad*, which has *menis* at its core, after he emphasized Socrates' calmness.[27] Achilles and Socrates cannot be further apart, and their respective returns 'home' have radically different reasons. Socrates has not chosen his circumstances, but he accepts them. He did not desire to be condemned to death; however, he accepts his situation without being frustrated by it. Even more, he welcomes his return home, for which he has prepared himself, even if he did not cause it directly. In Achilles's case, the return is his decision. He does not accept his circumstances and chooses to go back home as an answer to the affront he received from Agamemnon. However, despite the difference between these two returns, the *Iliad* has an important role. In using this verse, Plato communicates to his readers the source of the problem: anger. Anger clouds us and makes us believe that justice is the return of the equal. At the same time, he also suggests the alternative to anger: one can return home (perhaps to oneself) when one acts like Socrates.

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[26] For the *Iliad*, I used Homer, *Iliad*, transl. by S. Lombardo, Indianapolis-Cambridge, Hackett Publishing House, 1997.

[27] In his *Dialectic*, Stokes points out that there are at least two reasons to consider the dream as a reference to death. First, "Plato's Socrates might have thought of death as a return home for his soul" (p. 33). But Stokes also points out that 'Phthia' begins with 'phthi,' "which is the root of the Greek verb φθίνω (*phthínō*) meaning (though not commonly in classical prose) 'die'" (ibid.). As other commentators, he also mentions (p. 34) that Crito seems to be too preoccupied with his purpose to pay attention to Socrates' dream, even if Phthia is in Thessaly, which is one of the possible refuges for Socrates (see 45c).

From the beginning of the dialogue, Plato makes us aware that there are events in life following their course regardless of our own desire. The ship comes from Delos, and at its arrival Socrates must be executed. The ship will arrive regardless of whether Socrates' sentence is just or not. Whatever comes to be, though, is not in itself bad or good news. Socrates only says, "may it be for the good" (43d). If so pleases the gods, so be it.

Socrates' passivity[28] is not resignation. Socrates is not a tragic character defeated by destiny.[29] He is not Antigone, one for whom the audience is invited to mourn. Instead, his passivity is beyond the distinction between action and passivity. When Crito comes to his cell to urge him to leave, Crito pushes on Socrates a dichotomy that is foreign to the philosopher – just as Antigone had pushed on Ismene a choice: she had to show her 'true colors'. If he remains within this dichotomy, Socrates can only lose, regardless of his choice. If he stays in prison and accepts his death, he is a coward who does not fight for his life and does not take upon himself the responsibility to take care of his own children. If he escapes, then he is one who disobeys the law. In this situation, whatever decision he makes, it would not be a just one. Socrates makes it clear from the beginning that he does not live within such a dichotomy. He does not refuse talking about it, so he will engage Crito's beliefs by claiming the position of the laws, but he shows that it does not affect him. That which is inflicted haphazardly upon him does not make him better or worse, wise or foolish. It just is irrelevant.[30]

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[28] This passivity may remind one of E. Levinas' "passivity more passive than all passivity" in *Otherwise than Being*, Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 2002, p. 14. See also p. 92-93.

[29] See Halliwell, "Plato and Aristotle," who discusses the repudiation of suffering in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. See also D. LaCourse Munteanu, *Tragic Pathos: Pity and Fear in Greek Philosophy and Tragedy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012. She points out that "philosophers perceive ordinary desires as immoderate and ordinary fears as degrading reflections of ignorance, and therefore do not foster them" (p. 54). Reflecting on the *Phaedo* as well, Munteanu says that, "despite the tragic premise, [...] no one ought to feel pity for the philosopher about to die nor should he fear his own death" (p. 57).

[30] See also G. Vlastos, *Socratic Studies*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 112. Vlastos points out that in the *Crito*, just as in other dialogues, Socrates shows that others cannot make us better or worse. Referring to 44d, Vlastos says, "The 'greatest evils' which 'the many' do have the power to inflict are those which involve non-moral goods – the deprivation of material possessions, civic status, physical life. The 'greatest goods' which they cannot confer are in the moral domain: they are impotent to make one morally better or worse: Socrates' virtue is beyond the power of the 'many' to enhance or impair" (p. 112).

In the dialogue, Socrates is faced with an 'Achilles surrogate', Crito, who suggests that the appropriate answer when wronged is to desire to wrong the harming party. For Crito, it is difficult to understand why Socrates would not do so. It may be easy to dismiss Crito's emotional reaction to a friend's death and his inability to be faithful to his prior beliefs when he perceives that they no longer benefit him. However, if we consider how we feel when we are wronged unjustly, we may discover that we are often an Achilles at heart – and so we discover that we may also be overtaken by *menis*. Plato knows that anger is a powerful emotion, and he reminds his readers of its power when he mentions the episode with Achilles and his planned return to Phthia. At the same time, he also makes Socrates remind the confused Crito that they have often said that the right thing to do is to never respond with harm when harmed, but, although Crito seemed to have acquiesced to this view in the past, he is no longer able to refuse an idea of justice that is prevalent in the Greek world of the time. The laws have harmed Socrates and this transformed them into enemies. It would only be right for Socrates, in this context, to harm them back – and Crito is surprised that anger had not yet taken a hold of him.

After all, Crito is very human. Just imagine that it was not he coming to Socrates in prison, but Antigone. Would she have a different approach? Wouldn't she find Socrates' calmness – perhaps even coldness – somewhat incomprehensible, even irrational? Why would Socrates accept his death penalty when he has been wronged by the laws? Why would he say that it is better to be harmed than to harm? His actions may remind Antigone of Ismene, her sister, who does not want to "die outside the law" (59). After all, Antigone may call Socrates an enemy because he disagrees with her, just as she rushes to call her own sister an enemy: "For God's sake, speak out. You'll be more enemy to me/If you are silent" (86-87). Such attitudes are normal for people who identify themselves with their own beliefs. If you attempt to propose a different view, they perceive this 'disagreement' as an attack to their own person, and so you become their enemies, just as Ismene could be for Antigone.

In the *Crito*, this was precisely the problem. The harm that the laws have created separates the world into friends and enemies. Crito, just as Antigone, responds to this by changing the laws' perspective on who the friends and the enemies are. Socrates has a different approach: he does not fight Crito's view, but he reminds him of his previous belief, that they should benefit all, regardless of what others do. However, because Crito is

no longer able to agree, Socrates lets the Laws themselves work against Crito and give him reasons that he can accept.[31]

Reassessment of Justice

So far I have suggested that Plato and Sophocles show in the *Crito* and the *Antigone* respectively that justice as benefitting friends and harming enemies is pernicious. The first problem stems from the personal approach to justice. If two enemies believe that it is just to harm one's enemy, they are both just even if they attack each other. Further, people can have different criteria for deciding on their friends. We see in Sophocles' play that Antigone considers Polyneices a friend, while Creon punishes him as enemy. In Plato's dialogue, Crito is ready to ask Socrates to disregard the laws because they have harmed him. Instead of clarifying criteria for action, justice complicates things and allows people to choose according to their own personal values. After all, Crito is not mistaken in believing that running away from prison is the just action: Socrates would stay with his friends and family and punish those who condemned him. Antigone is not unjust in attempting to bury her brother: he is her 'friend', and so she is duty-bound to do anything for him. Creon himself acts justly when he leaves Polyneices's corpse for the dogs and subsequently condemns his new enemy, Antigone, to death. However, they all act out of what seems to be their own perspectives on life.

Justice requires a belief that divides people between enemies and friends. But friends and enemies are personal, and so the division is also the result of a personal perspective on the world. This perspective is dominated by emotion: whenever we are harmed, we are angered, and this emotion pushes us to act against those we perceive to be our enemies. The *Antigone* and the *Crito* show this aspect of justice. The *Crito* goes one step further: the idea that someone must benefit one's friends and harm one's enemies stands only if that person believes that he can be harmed. Socrates is not such being. At the end of his trial, he already said that "a good man cannot be harmed either in life or in death" (*Apol.* 41d) – his attitude remains constant throughout Plato's dialogues. If a good man cannot be harmed, a good man has no enemies, and the only thing he can do is do good to all.

[31] See R. Weiss, *Socrates Dissatisfied: An Analysis of Plato's* Crito, New York-Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998. She correctly claims that the views of the Laws in the *Crito* are not shared by Socrates.

The superiority of 'benefitting all' to 'benefitting your friends only and punishing your enemy' is not only negative: you avoid making errors about friends and enemies. In fact, its superiority stems from the benefit that you actually receive. Your soul remains good. If Socrates' belief that a good man cannot be harmed is correct, the Greek idea of justice becomes paradoxical: your soul must be not-good (so harmable) in order to be just. Only in this condition could it decide between friends and enemies.

This aspect brings us back to mercy. For Socrates, benefitting all stems from goodness. Regardless of the other people's intention to harm, a good soul cannot harm back. The problem we encounter, though, is that the only souls that can act so are those which are already good. A superhuman like Socrates, who sleeps peacefully a few days before his execution, has no need to harm others when they believe they harm him because this would not benefit him in any way. For him, anger does not need to be appeased; it is absent. What are all other mortals to do, those who are not Socrates and who, just like Crito, want to pay back when they are harmed even if they had priory agreed that one should never harm back? Should we say that a 'merciful' attitude is exclusively the characteristic of an already good soul? Both the *Antigone* and the *Crito* seem to say so: all characters, with the exception of Socrates, arrive to a point where their attachment to beliefs leads them to fear of loss, and thus to anger and the desire to harm others. Even Haemon, who begins his dialogue with his father openly, ends in anger when he sees that his father cannot be brought on his side. The *Crito* also shows who are the people who can escape this: those who free themselves so much of their own opinions that they are aware that their opinions are of little worth. Socrates' justice is not yet Isaac of Syria's mercy: in Christianity, harm is a reality, and mercy is relevant only in the context of such harm. Nevertheless, we can witness in Sophocles' *Antigone* and Plato's *Crito* the birth of a new notion of justice that is keener to mercy than to anger because it stems from the awareness that human knowledge is worth nothing and from the belief that a good man cannot be harmed.

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