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Introduction

In his quote, Socrates clearly states his ideal for (his) behaviour.

(1) It is preferable to suffer than to do that which is unjust.

To a certain extent, this is a noble ideal seemingly all should aspire to. Let us then, for the purpose of this essay, imagine a man that would like to follow this ideal. He wants to always act justly and this man would rather suffer than perform unjust actions. Let us call him the Socratic Man. First, however, the Socratic Man has to examine this quote more closely.

The Pursuit of Happiness

Looking at (1), first, what is the reason *why* the Socratic Man should even want to follow this rule? It initially seems not in line with human nature to do that what (1) it asks us to. If we look at a human's purpose (albeit far too simplistically, but bear with me for the purpose of this argument) in an epicurean lens, then that would say that a human's goal is the pursuit of happiness. However, isn't the nature of suffering exactly opposite to this the pursuit of happiness? Although it isn't necessarily true that suffering leads to unhappiness (counterexamples can be imagined), it seems absurd to say that suffering would lead to happiness. And imagining the median case of a human, suffering would indeed lead to a great deal of unhappiness. So then, assuming that this is true, it seems absurd for any human to do that which makes him unhappy: suffering.

We can, however, reasonably assume that there isn't only one such nature of happiness, and that doing that which is unjust is somehow even worse for the pursuit of happiness. A man that regularly does that which is unjust for the pursuit of his happiness, we would assume, would simply due to the pure hedonism of his actions be following in the pursuit of his happiness. However, perhaps Socrates is saying that while acting unjustly would lead to lessening one's suffering (and by extension, due to the points discussed now), the moral and spiritual damage to the "soul" would be even less preferable.

To elaborate: given a human being, acting immorally and unjustly would lead to less spiritual fulfillment, the sort of spiritual fulfillment that comes from doing that which is good. Given a conventionally classically greek imagining of the soul, the nature of the rational human and the human soul is such that it wants to do that which is just or good. Wouldn't a human acting not in accordance with that face spiritual unhappiness? Of course, there are humans that aren't *good* humans. However, our Socratic Man is a good human. For the Socratic Man, this would mean that the spiritual fulfillment of acting justly (or not acting unjustly) would be preferable to the spiritual or moral suffering brought upon him by acting unjustly, despite the suffering this might bring upon him.

To make clear the terms here, the nature of suffering which Socrates talks about is different from the morally spiritual suffering I'm talking about here. In the case of a good human (a morally good humans, who desires to do that which is just and morally good), the suffering Socrates mentions is *physical suffering*, while the suffering I mentioned in the preceding paragraph is the suffering of the soul (or consciousness) brought upon by not acting in accordance with one's nature.

I shan't talk more deeply about human's nature or (perceived) purpose, so the presumptions I made here will have to stand not fully supported, and taken for granted.

(2) For a good human, it is preferable to suffer and not act unjustly, than to not suffer and act unjustly.

Where I presume that:

- (i) Humans desire to be happy, and this is their goal.
- (ii) A good human is such that it is his nature to want to do good.
- (iii) Spiritual happiness is greater than physical happiness.

Hence:

- (iv) A human will achieve greater happiness from suffering and not acting unjustly.

From which (2) follows.

However, we could question (2)(ii) here. There is a presumption that it is morally good to be just. Is it truly "good" to act justly? Is it always morally good to be just? And given that a morally good human wants to do good, wouldn't it bring greater suffering to not act unjustly? If that is true, then we can't really say that (1) is true either. Given (2)(ii), it would imply something else.

(1*) It is not preferable to suffer and act unjustly, if acting unjustly means doing that which is not morally good.

The Nature of Justice

For the Socratic Man, however, if he wants to follow the tenet of (1), it would mean that he would also have to know what is just and unjust, and where justice comes from. We have sketched out a reasons why (1) is true with (2). From (2) and its following premises, we have established that for a morally good human (1) holds true given that justice is morally good.

So, this calls for a close examination of what is justice. Justice can naively be defined as equity for all; the awarding of merit for those who deserve it; the awarding of punishment. This, for all,

equally, such that it is done in the correct proportion to that deed that was done. In short, the equal awarding of just desserts. What, however, defines what is just and unjust?

In the practical sense in the human world, justice is defined by the legal system. Let us assume a quasi-institutional definition of justice. This would imply that what is just is defined by an external objective authority: the law. However, it cannot be said that the law is truly objective. As the origin of law is within law makers, who are humans, and law-makers base their decisions on society, which is made up of also humans. Hence, effectively, justice is defined subjectively within the minds of humans. Within a political system, as the law-makers are voted in, justice is defined from the *mean* of society, that is, the average person. So, justice doesn't have an equal source from all the members of society, and not all might agree.

Following this line of thought, is justice morally good? Ideally, the law should such that it reflects the morals of the society, as the law serves the society and its members, moving from the subjective nature of the human mind to become an objectively appreciable idea within the context of a society.

Let us assume that moral good is defined by the members of a society. Then, in an ideal society justice *is* that which is good, as the law will reflect the morals of all the members of society.

Imagining the Socratic Man within this ideal society, where what is just is good and what is unjust is bad, and justice reflects the morals of all in the society perfectly (or all subjective conceptions of individual morals are moral facts), we would say that (1) and (2) would hold true. The Socratic Man would be achieving spiritual fulfillment within this society, by not doing that which is unjust, and doing that which is morally good.

However, imagining an ideal society where that which is just is good seems an unrealistic, and a nigh-absurd, conclusion given the terms of (1). In the first place, how would it come to be that the Socratic Man would come to suffer under injustice, or suffer at all within this society? It seems illogical to say that this ideal society, where all would be done in accordance with the law, and all would be done morally good, and this moral good would be in accordance with the will of the people, that there would be such a thing as suffering. From where would this suffering come from? Why would anyone choose to act unjustly if the society perfectly reflects their morals?

It seems more reasonable to assume an imperfect society (and more practical for the Socratic Man), where it isn't *necessarily* true that justice truly reflects the morals of all the members of the society perfectly. For instance, what about a society where its law does *not* reflect the Socratic Man's conception of morals? Ergo, there would be a conflict between what is morally good and what is just. Ergo, it would not be preferable for the Socratic Man to not act unjustly, as it would bring him greater suffering to not act "unjustly". In fact, where there is a conflict of justice and morally good actions, acting unjustly would be the morally more appreciable action. Hence, given our quasi-institutional definition of justice, (1) and (2) aren't exactly true, as there are cases where (1*) is true.

For example, let us imagine the Socratic Man within a country that is very strict on abortion law. The Socratic Man is a policeman, who is called to arrest a younger woman who killed her husband due to certain knowledge that her husband is going to kill her child (let us assume that this action was morally good, though some might disagree). Although the action was morally good, it wasn't just within the society, and hence she performed an unjust action. The Socratic Man can arrest the woman, which would be justice, or he could not arrest her given that he feels her actions were morally acceptable for him. Here, it would bring him greater spiritual fulfillment to *not* arrest her.

In fact, is it even possible to imagine a system of justice that would be morally good? Justice in the legal sense by definition requires defining the just desserts that should be given for actions; this brings us to the question of how just desserts should be defined? Any legal system faces the issue of balancing multiple ideas: retribution, rehabilitation and security. When someone is given a prison sentence for x years, the punishment serves the purpose of protecting the law abiding members of society from the non-law abiding members of society; it punishment gives the victim the satisfaction of retribution; rehabilitation serves the purpose of allowing the prison victim to integrate into society as a better human. As a result of this, legal systems with different conceptions of justice appear.

There are, for instance, systems focused on retributive justice, where the goal is to give the victim the satisfaction of punishing the criminal for an appropriate amount of time. If the members of society don't feel that there is adequate retribution for the act, the members of society might feel injusticed by society and the legal system, creating a worse society. Hence, the just desserts of justice here in the punishment for the criminal. In systems focused on rehabilitation of criminals, the effect of retribution is made smaller (criminals suffer smaller sentences), in return for giving greater justice to the criminal, as he has the opportunity to change and become better as a human,

and make society better, as there is one less criminal and one more functioning member of society. Both systems have their own conception of justice, and in both the goal creates a better society. So how should a legal system balance justice for the victim and justice for the criminal?

Ideally, this would be done by perfectly balancing the amount of just desserts given. But let us imagine a society where we can instantly rehabilitate criminals and make them better members of society (though it does sound quite dystopian). We could remove all prison punishments, and simply allow the criminal to be immediately rehabilitated. This wouldn't be just for the victim though, so we would still have to punish them. However, since we have the option of making society and the criminal better, would this also be just for the criminals to not give them a better future?

Hence, what is just for one man might not be just for another. What about the classic example of a starving man stealing food for his family? For the person from whom the food was stolen, it is unjust that he got robbed. For the starving man, it is unjust that he is in a society where he is starving. Justice, sometimes, is a very contradictory term.

So then, for the purpose of (1) and (2) to be true, it seems that the nature of justice has to be defined differently. For the Socratic Man to want to not act unjustly, he has to have a conception of justice that is in accordance with his own subjective moral system. Or, there has to be a clearly defined objective universal of Justice, according to which the Socratic Man can know what is just or unjust. However, even given an objective universal of Justice, the Socratic Man within the mind of the Socratic Man, the objective universal is subjectively appreciated. In the end, what is just has to be internalized by the Socratic Man, and the definition has to come from within himself (whether this does or doesn't come from an objective universal), and be in accordance with his morals. If what is unjust is morally good, it seems an absurd conclusion to want to say that suffering is preferable to acting unjustly (and morally). Hence, (1) requires a conception of justice where justice is moral for the Socratic Man. However, the previous section brings doubts as to whether there really is a way justice can be objectively defined such that it is moral and just for all.

The Sacrifice of the Socratic Man

It seems then, harder and harder for the Socratic Man to live by Socrates' ideal. The Socratic Man has to be an ideal human, in that his conception of morals has to be perfect. He has to perfectly strive to be an ideal human. He has to sacrifice his physical happiness and undergo suffering to the purpose of this Socratic ideal. If justice is institutionally defined, he has to sacrifice his morals to be just in the name of society. And as was outlined, it might be that perfect justice isn't even perfectly moral; therefore, the Socratic man might also lose his spiritual fulfillment from being morally good in acting justly. Is it even just for the Socratic Man to suffer for not acting unjustly?

And is the Socratic Man really following the ideal of a human? That is, is an ideal human that which wants to do that which is just and good? We can certainly imagine different conceptions of purpose for humans. Socrates' quote implies that his ideal imagining of a human is one that is just. And yet, someone like Artistoteles might say that absolute adherence to not acting unjustly in and of itself isn't the ideal for human, where he might argue for more mediation in how just a human is. And we can't really either say that a society where everyone acts as a Socratic Man is a good society. It would be a society all would be willing to suffer in the name of not being unjust.

In the end, a Socratic Man is not the most virtuous ideal for humans. It seems more laudable to suffer in the name of being morally good than to be just. Given how we outlined the nature of justice, it isn't necessarily true of justice that it is also morally good. Should humans strive to be

morally less in the name of being just? I would certainly say not, and I would argue that an ideal human is one that is *good*, not *just*. Let us then appreciate the Socratic Man for what he is, but not strive to be him. It is an ideal that we can try to emulate, but not to be. A Socratic Man is a facet of a good person, but definitely *not* what a morally good person is.