# The personal benefits of moral action in Plato's *Republic*

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**Abstract**

In this article, I examine the question of the personal benefit enjoyed by an agent who executes a just and good action. Based on the idea of a balanced soul as described in Plato's *Republic* book IV and a *midrashic* speculative interpretation of Plato's allegory of the cave, I suggest that by doing the right and good thing a person benefits from "seeing" the constant unchangeable aspects of reality as good. *Seeing* those aspects of reality as good is good in itself, but it also drives the person to learn those aspects and adjust to them.

Keywords: moral education; the Good; the good life; reality; Plato's *Republic*.

1. **The question**

Is there any personal (not legal or social) benefit in giving away, in self-restraint, while there is an alternative action through which the agent would achieve more power? For example, is there any personal benefit in returning £250,000 that was accidently transferred to your bank account from a big organization or a rich person who would not even notice the mistake (Benedictus 2012)? If you are worried that the transfer would be permanently documented, imagine instead returning a case of money that no one saw you find, or a smaller amount of money, say £10,000. In the same vein, one may ask, is there any personal benefit in putting one's life and the lives of one’s family in danger to help another, say a persecuted refugee (assuming that it is the moral thing to do in the situation)? In general – waiving what would seem to be in one's best interests?

The question arises because, while from a legal or social-order point of view one *has to* return the lost money, from an individualistic, competitive, everyday-life perspective, the answer would seem to be different. To waive a relative advantage one has over others seems to be, from the perspective of everyday life, an act of a naive, self-sacrificing gullible person. From this perspective, the performance of good deeds entails a compromise. Therefore, the common rationale for doing the good is social or legal, and in general, negative; i.e., the rationale is concerned with the *risks* (e.g. excommunication, punishment, revenge) of *not acting* in accordance with the good, rather than with the individual benefits of doing the good (Plato, Rep.2.358-367).

The issue behind the question is important for education (moral education) in an individualistic cultural context where parents and educators should to look for a rationale for their moral demands from the perspective of the individual self-fulfillment, freedom and happiness. How can we expect from ourselves and the young generation both self-fulfillment and self-restraint – waiving relative advantages?

As such, in terms of the individual student’s interests of happiness and self-fulfillment, it may seem that as teachers and parents we have all the reasons to advise them (face-to-face and behind closed doors) that, if they have an option to increase their relative advantage without risking themselves (let alone risking themselves for a big moral idea), they should (again - personally speaking) do so without hesitation. Would you advise your children or students otherwise? If so, why?

In what follows I will give an account of the personal benefits of moral action. In order to do so I will suggest a connection between what we usually conceive to be a just and good action and two elements in Plato's *Republic*: the idea of a balanced soul as described in book IV and a *Midrashic* speculative method of interpretation of Plato's allegory of the cave from book VII. I will suggest that in doing the right and good thing, a person benefits by "seeing" the constant unchangeable aspects of reality as good. Seeing those aspects of reality as good is good in itself, and in a way the purpose of human life and human education; yet it also drives that person to learn those aspects and adjust to them. Before describing my suggestion in detail, I will briefly review three different readings of the *Republic* regarding the question of the personal benefits of good moral action.

1. **The question and Plato's Republic**

This question is famously raised in Plato's *Republic*. But his answer is quite vague. He does not give a clear description of the good, and it is not explicitly clear from his writings whether he would consider our illustration of good deeds (returning a wallet, helping a refugee and so on) an expression of the Good. In the *Republic*, Socrates declares that he himself does not know what the Good – the most important thing – is (Plato, Rep.6.506b-506c). Irwin (1995) points to Plato’s silence regarding the substantial content of the good by claiming that "proper explanation and defense of Plato's conception of the good are left to later Greek moralists" (Irwin 1995, 317)*.* Nevertheless, Irwin tries to understand Plato's idea of justice by distinguishing between two ideas of justice: "Platonic-justice" and "common-justice" (1995, 283). Platonic-justice is the proper inner balance of the soul that Plato describes in book IV (see below), while common justice is what we conceive of as justice in everyday language, i.e. caring and acting in the interest of the good of others (Irwin 1995, 293). This connection is not trivial in Irwin's eyes, since he believes that all the four degenerate regimes and characters described by Plato in the last books of the *Republic* (timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny [Rep. 8.545b-c]) express deep injustice from the common perspective (common-justice), yet do not show any injustice in terms of Platonic-justice. Irwin finds it difficult to attribute an un-balanced soul to them (I will elaborate Platonic-justice below), because he sees the way they set goals and pursued them as perfectly rational. Irwin claims that we cannot say that any one of the corrupted types is controlled by the appetites (Irwin, 1995, 285). Irwin believes that this inner tension does not merit any explicit clarification or other solution in the *Republic*. As he concludes his account on the *Republic*:

Does Plato show that p-just [Platonic-justice], as he eventually conceives it in the *Republic*, is a dominant part of happiness, important enough to ensure that the p-just person is always happier than the p-unjust person, no matter what else is true of them? We might agree that life is not worthwhile if it involves complete psychic chaos; but why might it not be worth scarifying some p-just for a larger supply of other goods? To answer this question, we need to know more about why p-justice is a good in itself and about the way in which other goods are good; we also need to reexamine the character of the human good and its relation to rational activity.

When we see that this question arises, we come to the most important unfinished element in the argument of the *Republic* (Irwin, 1995, 317).

Irwin is thus concerned with the same question in Plato which I have raised. However, while from his perspective the *Republic* does not answer this question, I will attempt to show that it does.

Kraut (1999) also attempts to understand how a just action can benefit the agent. He rejects general claims that fall into circularity in their argumentation. He believes that the connection between justice and the good lies in the need for political justice in order to live the good life. The good life is the search for the Good, the Form of the good, which possesses perfect harmony and order. This perfect harmony ought to be realized in the earthly lives of the individual and the community. From this point of view, Kraut deduces that the interest or benefit of the philosopher to do justice in the political sphere is in promoting social welfare and harmony in their political sphere. Such an order is needed for them to contemplate the ideal Forms (Kraut, 1999, 329).

I believe there are two limitations in Kraut's account. The first is in the scope of the problem. As I showed at the beginning of the article, the problem is relevant beyond the purview of philosophers; it is relevant to all individuals, and in particular all educators which all parents are. They must give an account, first of all to themselves, of the rationale for their moral demands from their children and students. The second limitation I find in Kraut's account is that, although he describes the psychological benefits of just lives, what Irwin calls Platonic-justice, (i.e. temperance, peace of mind, the ability to control the appetites), he does not resolve what Irwin considers an internal, textual difficulty in Plato's text – that is, he does not give an account of the inner connection of this just balanced soul with the good action. In other words, he does not explain what it means to see the Forms and contemplate them and how it connects to do the right and good thing.

1. **The problem of the personification-theistic reading**

But how can we give a concrete account *beyond* what the text itself offers? In other words, how can we tackle Irwin's claim that Plato has left the concrete understanding of the good to future moral philosophers? Rist (2012) suggests a theistic perspective in which he reads Plato from Plotinus' perspective. He too finds that there is a gap in Plato's *Republic*, and generally in Plato's texts, between the Form of the Good which is formal and impersonal on the one hand, and the moral obligation of the human agent to do the good moral action on the other. Therefore, he suggests a personification of the Form of Good as God and God's will (Rist, 2012, 269). Without such a God, Rist claims, there can be no obligation to moral action, and to use my terms, no benefit for the individual arising from the good and just action. Only if "wrongdoing is a sin against a creator as well as a crime, its seriousness is the better understood, inasmuch as it offends not only against the Good (as God), but against his commands" (Rist, 2012, 268). Thus, in Rist’s eyes, for there to be a benefit for the individual in doing the good action, there must be a personification of the Good as God's will.

Although Rist says that Plato himself expresses his awareness of this gap in later writing, such as *Phaedrus* and the *Laws*, I believe that Plato would not have approved of this personalizing solution. Personalizing the Good creates moral and metaphysical problems. Rist himself mentions a few of these metaphysical problems, including the issue regarding the ability of God to "know" the particulars (Rist, 2012, 267). He does not mention the problematic moral and metaethical implications that the personalizing solution creates. One of the problems is that it materializes the transcendent sublime, and this would be a deep contradiction of one of Plato’s well-accepted and central themes regarding the human inclination to ascribe a hyperbolic value of realness to earthly-material things which possess very little amount of the property of realness (Rep. 6.510a). In many places, Plato shows our mistaken inclination to give exaggerated value – value of realness – to things which do not possess a large amount of realness. Yet this is exactly what personification of the Good would bring about. For it serves, as Rist actually points out, as an instrument for performing the moral deed.

This makes the specific "moral deed" superior in hierarchy to the personal God. This perspective may easily lead to the slippery slope of pseudo-moral actions in the name of God. People start thinking that their idea of what is good (for example punishing sinners, inquiring and frightening them, or waging a war on them) is a goal which the personal God should serve. In other words, once the good becomes the personal God, it loses its transcendent sublime holiness in favor of the material earthly level of existence. And this mixture is, at least in Plato's eyes, an ontological contradiction. Again, since the amount of realness of the material earthly ontological level is much less than that which is pure reality, or as Gadamer names the Platonic Good: the "arché, the starting point (principle) of everything" (1986, 90). This mixture illusion of taking the value of pure reality and giving it to earthly things leads to endless inner divisions which bring tensions, conflicts, and cruel wars – absolutely not holy. It is worth mentioning here that Plato did not foresee (as he did with timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and the tyrannical state and individual types), the theocratic corruption of the best state and the individual.

Nevertheless, I do not wish to omit the moral obligation of the agent, even though Rist suggests that it is the only alternative for those who do not agree with personalizing the Good (2012, 268).Therefore, in order to find another way to bridge this gap between the personal good and the just deed, and in order to give some concrete illustrations of the good, I would like to suggest more speculative interpretation than that of Irwin and Kraut, while avoiding personification of the Good as suggested by Rist.

To do this, I will use a literary method of interpretation, or a kind of *Midrash*. Midrash is an old traditional Jewish method of interpreting the ancient Bible and canonical texts. The aim of the interpretation is the reconciliation of apparent contradictions in the text. It does so by creating a new story based on the original one (Dimitrovsky, 2001). These stories illuminate themes and other aspects of the original text that were supposed to be analytically included in it from the beginning. Melzer (2014) calls for such an esoteric reading of Plato. Plato, he claims, is one of the most central thinkers who wrote in an esoteric style. He calls for a reading between Plato's lines while looking also for what Plato *shows* through the specific characters, the specific moment in the conversations, or the *way* things are being said.

In what follows, I will show, according to Plato's *Republic*, the benefits that the individual receives from performing the right and the good deed. To do this, we must find a connection between (1) what we intuitively conceive as a good deed – say returning a lost wallet, helping a refugee (common-justice in Irwin terms) and (2) what is considered by Plato as a benefit to the individual – the balanced soul (Plato-justice in Irwin terms).

The well-known fragments regarding the good are in books VI and VII when Socrates is asked by Glaucon and Adeimantus to say what the good is. Although his anger response to their question seems to be a dramatic overreaction by him, his answer is unequivocal – it is impossible to talk about the Good (Rep 6.506b-c). Yet in response to their pressure, he agreed to say something, not directly about the good, but about the *descendants* of the Good – Truth and Knowledge. After Socrates tries to explain the enigmatic analogy of the sun (his first answer regarding the nature of the Good) with the *analogy of the divided line* (his second answer), he continues to the *allegory of the cave*. In this famous allegory, he attempts to illustrate the differences between the good, educated lives, and uneducated lives. In this allegory, he also describes the process of transferring from the uneducated lives to the good ones. I will use a speculative *Midrash* style to read this allegory.

1. **Midrash of the allegory of the cave**

If we assume that life in the cave represents an unworthy life for humans, and that exiting the cave and living outside it represents the good life, then an answer regarding the differences between the *life-experience* (LE) of those two general alternative ways of life will provide us a clue regarding the substantial content of the good and what the benefits of living this life are.

In imagining the "prisoners’" LE, we may deduce that: since it is their own nature that binds them looking at the cave’s wall (the reason why the title “prisoners” is only a metaphor), therefore they will always look to return to that place even though they see what is behind them. This being the case, the LE in the cave can reasonably be characterized by the feeling of a place that one desires to return to, a place of comfort, control, security – of allegedly being *beyond reality*. "Reality" is *there*, on the wall, and the prisoners watch it like rich tourists from their comfortable hotel; like zapping channels on TV from a warm comfortable couch; like surfing the internet. In other words, since one of the main characteristics of the "prisoners" LE is that the "reality" is *in front* of them *over there* on the wall, we can deduce that life inside the cave is experienced as being beyond "the world": beyond history and time and beyond physics and space. Like being in a warm sleep. This comfortable state of mind is expressed in the resentment of the Athenian people towards Socrates while he was examining their presumption about central social and moral categories such as courage, knowledge, justice, virtue, and so on. Their comfortable and familiar understanding and categorizing of the world, their common distinctions, dichotomies, and hierarchies were their comfort cave, their "touristic," protected comfort-zone.

On the other hand, the individual that is pulled out of the cave, as she uncomfortably becomes aware of her own ignorance as well as her community’s unconscious-ignorance, seems to *see* and experience herself as being, not beyond the reality but *within it*; as a subject of it all, a very tiny part of it all (Rep. 7.516b-c); *not* at all an experience of controlling reality, but on the contrary – of being controlled by it; she experiences in each and every bone of her body that reality is all over, around her and within her. While life inside the cave has the ability of controlling the "real", outside the cave, one has no control over its main elements: the sun, the heat, the cold, the starting and ending of the beating of one’s heart.

Existentially speaking, outside the cave the individual grasps her fragileness, her partiality temporal nature; and as is well known, and according to many thinkers and texts that emphasize the existential aspect of the human life experience (such as Ecclesiastes, Plato's Phaedo, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Camus, or Sartre), it is accepted that awareness of the naked reality invokes anxiety and depression. In the text of Plato, these feelings are represented by the sufferings one bears in this very long journey outside the cave and in becoming used to the world outside. The secure ground, the controlled fire, and controlled "reality" *over there* (on the wall of the cave) has been undermined, and one finds one’s self as a temporal ignorant guest, totally *subject* to the Real. Thus, it is no surprise that no one wants to leave the cave, and the one who is *compelled* to go through the process suffers and continues to resist the process, trying to go back.

For this and other reasons, it is hard to keep in mind this new self-perspective of the individual's place within reality (anonymous 2016). As been said, it is an existential situation that we may wish to forget, to repress. But in spite of this, Plato, as a lover of unity, coherence, and truth, cannot accept that the real is bad and causes suffering: if the truth about one's reality causes them depression and anxiety, there must be something wrong in the way one conceives one’s self and reality. Therefore, the educational process should be aimed at adapting the soul so that it would cohere with this constant unchangeable form of existence as a whole[[1]](#footnote-2). And this process is described allegorically in the allegory of the cave. But what makes up this process? What is the force that changes the soul so that it finds joy and comfort rather than fear in the face of the Real? In the next section I will show that Plato implies that doing the just and good thing is the mean by which this attitude is changing.[[2]](#footnote-3)

1. **The good deed and its impact on the soul : Plato's "Copernican revolution"**

In book IV, Plato presents the good and just action (Plato-justice in Irwin's terms) as the force that educates the soul – creates its balance. A good and just action is one:

…which preserves and helps to produce this condition of soul, and wisdom the science that presides over such conduct; and believing and naming the unjust action [contrary to good and just action] to be that which ever tends to overthrow this spiritual constitution, and brutish ignorance [contrary to wisdom], to be the opinion that in turn presides over this" (Plato, Rep. 4. 443d – 444a).

I would like to focus on two ideas in this phrase. Firstly, the idea that there is an inner connection between the just and good deed (and the good life in general) on the one hand, and the inner balance of the person who acts on the other. Plato's "Copernican revolution" here is that the action precedes the inner balance and not the other way around. In other words, that the inner life is the aim in itself, and within it lies the desirable results, and not, as we usually think – in the outside world; for example, the reparation of the frustrated feelings of the person who lost the wallet. Secondly, the idea that wisdom from this perspective is seeing, wrapped in the overall constant metaphysical context of our lives, what sort of deed out of all possible deeds a situation potentially offers would help to create, develop, and preserve this inner united balance.

In the context of what I have suggested earlier regarding the life experience (LE) of the prisoners inside the cave vs. the LE of those on a journey out of the cave, we may offer to see the wise and good deed as one that would *keep in mind* the LE of being within reality – of being on a journey outside the cave. An immoral deed, on the contrary, would help to develop, deepen, and preserve the LE of the prisoners – the illusion of being beyond "reality". As such, we can generally say that, by choosing the good-moral possibility in a situation and putting it into practice, a person reminds herself of reality and her place within it; remembering, not just in terms of cogitation, but in the whole of her existence. This is why truth loving is a pre-condition on the path of the good life. It is the motivation to know, to remember reality, to be in accord with it, that drives the moral deed. I will come back to this theme later.

Therefore, and regarding our own case, the personal (not social or legal) benefit of returning a lost £250,000 to a very rich firm (who would not really feel the difference) has a moral educational impact that is not only on the social or interpersonal level, nor as Kraut has suggested only on the political sphere of the philosopher, but also on the internal level: by returning the money, one "reminds" one’s self of their place within reality; one recalls the LE of being pulled out of the cave. Keeping the lost money would break down their inner unity, their inner balance, i.e. it would return them to the cave's illusion of being beyond reality.

1. **Facing reality: good deeds or eat and drink for tomorrow we shall die**

A question arises here: why one's acknowledgment of their metaphysical-existential fragile partial temporal status would bring them to do a good deed – say returning lost money and not, say, adopting the approach of: "let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die" (EDTD approach to leaving) (Isaiah 22:13). In other words, why not choose a life which directs the use of one’s surroundings to maximize, whenever possible, one's advantage? Why not use every opportunity for pleasure even though it comes at the expense of others? After all – you only live once.

The answer is that living in accordance with an EDTD approach expresses a *deep frustration* with one's reality, with its metaphysical constant essential elements; an EDTD approach expresses a *resentfulness* of it. It is like being embroiled in a struggle with Reality. It means that if one had the opportunity to change one's metaphysical-existential status (for example to make oneself live forever like a god – see the character of Immortan Joe in Miller's *Mad Max: Fury Road* [2015]) one would do so without hesitation. This frustration and resentfulness is expressed in the monuments that tyrants – Pharaoh for example – have built for themselves throughout history; in the terror and the use of people and other lives to gain their being-beyond-reality (inner-cave) illusion – what in everyday language is sometimes wrongly called their power. It is wrong, because from the Platonic perspective I draw here, this is the opposite of power. To the contrary, the good and just deed expresses one's *acceptance* and *love* of that metaphysical-existential status. This inner acceptance and love is *created* and *maintained* by small and large human moral gestures: from returning a lost wallet, to risking one's life and the lives of one’s family without any rewards in order to help a persecuted refugee. Returning to our example, by keeping the £250,000 (as part of living in accordance with the EDTD approach or the competitive individualistic *geist*), I am not just expressing frustration, resentfulness, and fear from my place in the overall reality, I am also *creating* and *maintaining* within me this approach toward reality. While by returning the money on the other hand, I am *educating myself* to accept and love the constant unchangeable aspects of my place in the world – I am creating and maintaining a positive approach to it.

1. **The practical type**

But can we not think of an individual who does not live in accordance to the (extreme) EDTD approach, and yet finds it perfectly OK to not return the wallet, and actually does not return it and instead enjoys its fruits? A person who would not donate money or time to any goal without social demands or rewards in the form of status or honor or other benefits, let alone put themselves in danger to help persecuted refugee. Just for the sake of illustration, most of us can think of our "bourgeoisie" one dimensional social selves, and/or its caricature expressions in fictional characters such as George Darling, the father of Wendy Darling in Peter Pan, or Petunia and Vernon Dursley, Harry Potter's aunt and uncle – the prototype Muggles. I will name this person as the *practical* type. This practical character is one who may do whatever she can to increase her advantages over others, but will never break the common social norms. She may be very effective, intelligent, helpful to her friends and harmful to her enemies, a good negotiator – she can gain high honors and success. The question then is what the problem is with that way of life. Does leaving the cave say anything about that person who would not return the wallet or save the refugee, but does not live in accordance with the EDTD approach? Actually, this question brings us back to Irwin's claim that I have addressed above, that the degenerated types (timocrat, oligarch, democrat, and the tyrant) *do* have a balanced soul.

My answer to this is connected to the character of reason. MacIntyre, in his famous *After Virtue*, describes the failure of the enlightenment to establish morality without *telos*, i.e. a unifying end, arché, that gives meaning to everything, especially to our decisions, free choices, specific deeds, and our chosen way of life in general. His critique rests on the inability to divide the moral commandments from the *telos* that was their goal (MacIntyre, 2007, 53-55). This division from the telos, the arché, does not prevent the practical type from doing many things well, and even succeeding in the context of the common norms of social life and the technical world. But since that person would be inclined to deny, to repress all the existential, metaphysical elements of life – the constant unchangeable aspects of reality –, they would be paralyzed in the face of their inner split or denial, or the edges of social life and the technical world – the changeable dimensions of reality. For now, the constant unchangeable aspects of reality may be understood as death, illness, ignorance, or other constant elements of humanity, not necessarily with negative connotations.

Reason aspires to see *why* – it seeks a *reason*. Living the life of the practical character necessitates separating the reason from this inner aspiration, which is also part of its aspiration for truth, unifying harmonies, coherence, order. The self-educational process that creates a positive approach towards the constant unchangeable aspects of reality is necessary for those who cannot waive the craving of their reason for unifying harmonious order, for truth (see Kant's idea of reason as a unifying function in Williams 2016). In terms of the allegory of the cave, these truth-searching individuals, philosophers, would "prefer while living on earth to be serf of another, a landless man, and endure anything rather than" [return to the illusions of the cave] (Rep. 7.516d). For those who would rather withstand all the sufferings of the real and not live in illusion, moral lives, moral gestures are the only way to achieve happiness and create within them the unconditional joy of life, self-contained joy, in which on the one hand there is no need for falling into inner contradictions that demand the disconnecting of our reason and its need for coherence from ourselves, and on the other hand there is no suffering.

Therefore, it is not just the EDTD approach that costs its adherent negative feelings towards reality, it is also the price of the practical-type. Because while accepting the social and technical aspects of reality (the changeable aspects of reality), they still create within their souls a split in which the Form of reality (the unchangeable aspects of reality) and its epistemological parallel – the reason – must be denied. This denial necessarily creates a negative approach towards some aspects of reality, and thus to reality as a whole.

1. **The creation thought experiment: why Reality deserves our acceptance**

But why is it so good for one to love their reality and to accept it? Why is what is real or true also good, and does it thus deserve our acceptance and love? It should be clarified that, by accepting reality, I do not mean accepting every event, case, or phenomenon *within* reality – the changeable aspects of it. If there are, for example, cases of cruelty or hunger, we *ought* to rectify them and not accept them. But these events do not prevent us from accepting reality as a whole. Again, the question is regarding accepting the constant unchangeable aspects (the Form) of reality, the constant metaphysical dimension of reality.

So, why does what is real deserve our acceptance and love? Why is it good? Why, for example, should a refugee father who has lost his child in a bombardment of a tyrannical regime, or a woman who was sexually abused, accept Reality? I believe that this is the question that Plato is silent about – the ineffable. There cannot be a literal answer to it. Either one *sees* that reality as a whole (i.e. the Form of reality and existence as a whole) is good, or one does not. And of course, it is only by oneself that one may see this. Yet I believe that it is possible to give a sense of what it means to see that.

In order to get that sense, let us use a thought experiment. Imagine a time when you are all alone. In that time, you are approached by something that presents you with the following binary decision. There is a planet a billion light years away. The planet has nothing on it –a cold solid rock. It is also given that *nothing* that is happening on that empty planet can, for better or for worse, affect us here on earth, and never will. By pushing a button (an act of wishing or whatever binary procedure you prefer), this planet would develop an atmosphere and water, grass would grow, some insects, fish, rodents, birds, owls, and hawks would emerge. That's it. Again, it is given that none of these would have any effect, for better or for worse, on Earth and its surroundings. One more factor is that the person who has the option to push the button (you), would never have the ability to share the whole situation and the decision you make – it must forever be only with you. What then would you do?

I would like to claim that by deciding to push the button and creating life – without any interest – one expresses the intuition that existence as a whole is good. In other words, taking into account all the constant metaphysical characteristics of the reality (again, for now we mostly think of the inevitable separation from our loved ones, death, our inability to know the truth, diseases and degeneration of our bodies, our subjection to space and time and logic and so on), by pushing the button we express our willingness to accept reality as a whole, *including our subjection to the hurting and sad unchangeable elements that are included in it*. This hurting fate does not change the intuition that life, as a whole, is good, and that it is better that there is everything rather than nothing (Wittgenstein, 1965). An analogy from a personal point of view is to say that *no matter what* has happened to me, I am thankful for my birth and life, and always conceive of them as the better option (better on a totally different level) in comparison to the option of not having been born at all (see also Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* #341).

What then can we draw from Plato's *Republic* regarding the personal (not legal or social) benefits of doing what is good and just? And what rationale do we have as teachers and parents – as educators – to advise our students and children to, for example, return lost money even though they need it badly? The general main answer we have come to is that by actually doing the right and the good thing, we benefit the creation, development, and keeping of a united harmonious balanced soul. Such a soul is in a state of constant learning and searching to adjust itself so as to not suffer pain, fear, anxiety, or depression as a result of facing the Real and its place within it. These negative feelings direct it to look for compensational illusions in which it fantasizes itself beyond reality, and so depriving and suppressing its own craving for the truth and the real and soon becomes accustomed to that. What would a hard-working single parent benefit from returning good money that she had found? If at the moment of returning the money she directed her intention to the inner connection between existence as a whole, her place within it, and the Good, she would transform the returning event from a case of a gullible person who does not understand her surroundings into a metaphysical ceremony that binds the Good with the constant unchangeable aspects of Reality. The benefits of moral action is in harmonizing on the one hand the constant unchangeable aspects of Reality with acceptance and love rather than fear. Moreover, by doing the good, we also learn to accept and love the constant unchangeable elements of *our own* personal lives, and so to always appreciate our births and lives over the hypothetical possibility of not having been born at all.

Let us sum things up: I have illustrated the personal benefit of doing the just and good thing. I have exemplified what the Good in Plato's *Republic* may mean through a *midrashic* method of interpretation of Plato's allegory of the cave. I have combined this demonstration of the Good with Plato's idea regarding the just moral action and its aim regarding the soul's right balance. We saw that doing the just and good deed enables a person to see the Good, i.e. seeing as good the Form of reality – the constant unchangeable aspects of reality and our existence within it. These aspects of reality usually cause negative feelings, and thus lead to people dividing their soul and denying their regard for the truth. Seeing reality as a whole as good does not deny the sadness, anger, and feelings of frustration that these constant unchangeable aspects of reality may "cause" to the human individual; instead the individual sees all of them as part of existence as a whole which is accepted as Good.

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1. I use interchangeably the terms: "constant unchangeable form of existence", "constant unchangeable aspects of reality", "reality as a whole", "constant metaphysical context", "the Form of reality" and so on. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Biesta (2017) deals with the same issue from another perspective. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)