# Rationale for moral education: a reading in Plato's *Republic*

1. **The question**

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?

This thought experiment, to which I will return at the end of the article, is part of an attempt to deal with doubts regarding the possibility to find a rationale for moral education in our *prima facie* meaningless world. Doubts regarding the possibility of moral education arises while we are viewing reality, being, existence, as "groundlessness"; while perceiving "the *un-reason* of things"; while we feel that "being is a lawless series of events", and that "the groundless of being attests to the meaninglessness of all there is" (Oral 2017, p.40). These doubts regarding meaning and reason in our reality and being is intensified by (not to say that it has been directly resulted from) what Meillassoux (2010) calls the "essential spectres," i.e.:

[…] horrendous deaths: premature and odious deaths, such as the death of an infant, or the death of parents knowing that their children are doomed to the same fate, and other similar ends of an equal degree of horror. Natural or criminal deaths, of a sort that could not be predicted either for those who suffered or by those who survive them. A death that bears no meaning, no completion, no fulfilment: just an atrocious interruption of life, such that it would simply obscene to think that it was not experienced as such by those who suffered it (Meillassoux 2010 in Oral 2017, p. 50-51).

I call these horrible cases *the unchangeable aspects of reality*,or *the form of reality*,or *the logic of reality.*[[1]](#footnote-2) I assume that they are part of the logic, *the form*, of our existence. For, although it may seem to be a list of contingent unnecessary horrible events, it nevertheless represents, in my eyes, the necessitate part of our existence to bear many undesirable, yet unchangeable, components of reality. Beginning with impersonal limitations as our inability to know once and for all what is good, truth or just, our subjection to space and time, logic and law laws of nature, and of course we bear also the connected personal limitations as the inevitable separation from our loved ones, our specific future of degeneration of our body, existential loneliness, our specific personality and specific history, fate and so on. And on top of all that we bear the ever existing unjust and evil social phenome as deep poverty and starvation, social gaps, cynicism, alienation, and, as written in Ecclesiastes 8 14: *"There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: the righteous who get what the wicked deserve, and the wicked who get what the righteous deserve."* Oral (2017) while dealing with the same question regarding the possibility of a rationale for moral education in such unreasonable and meaningless context, concludes nevertheless that moral education is possible (p. 53). In the next section I will describe his argument.

The problem is that although this sphere of living feels as an unfair arena into which human beings are being born, nevertheless, they are called to live fairly, justly, morally. If a just and moral action and life includes elements of self-restraint, of waiving what would seem to be in one's interests or advantages (or even what only socially considered as an unfair advantages), a question may very reasonably be asked, what is the reason, the motivation, to act and live justly and morally in such meaningless chaotic un-reasonable, unfair reality? And who or what is so blind to call people to be moral and act so? In other words, it seems that two basic aspects of human lives contradict one another (1) the un-reason of things and the *prima facie* meaninglessness of being (2) the demand to live a just and moral life that include elements of acting in opposed to what may seem to be one's best interests, one's relative advantages.

For example, *why* should one overcome one's interests and return (not for legal or social reasons) £250,000 that was accidently transferred to one's bank account from a big organization or a rich person who would not even notice the mistake and assuming that this person will never be caught or punished by the authorities (see a case in Benedictus 2012)? *Why* do we expect one to overcome one's craving to revenge, or even to risks her or his life and to be compassionate to one's worst enemies and at least not to be cruel and arbitrariness with them? *What reason* there is to demand from one to put oneself and ones family in danger and help a runaway refugee kid? And even *why* wasting time and help other to change a tire, or to accept an unknown priest request to be the only participant in the funeral of a lonely old homeless?

From the perspective of a chaotic reality and the meaninglessness of being in which the righteous gets what the wicked deserve, and the wicked gets what the righteous deserve, to waive a relative advantage one has over others seems to be an act of a naive, self-sacrificing gullible person. That is why in a secular culture the reason that is commonly given for doing or not-doing what is considered to be good, is solely centered at the potential benefits or coasts within the socio-political-economical or legal realm: *the general social realm*. If it is true, it seem that in case of having the power to enjoy from an evil deed (from the eyes of the general social realm) without taking a risk to be punished, then one has all the justification doing it. It would be unintelligent, foolish and nonsensical to act otherwise (as Plato describes in the *Republic* book 2 using Glaucon and Adeimantus).

And so from an educational point of view, it may seem that as teachers and parents we have all the reasons and even the duty and responsibility, in such a meaningless world, to advise our children, students (face-to-face and behind closed doors – far from the general social realm), that, if they have an option to increase their relative advantage without risking themselves or be caught (let alone risking themselves for a big moral idea), they should do so without hesitation. Would you advise your children, students or yourself otherwise? If so, why? This article suggests a Platonic answer to the question of the inner rationale to act morally, i.e. to waive a relative advantages over others, in this *prima facie* meaningless reality.

1. **Oral answer based on Meillassoux**

In a search for a rational and justified moral education Oral formulates a similar question to the above: "[w]hat kind of ethics can one imagine in an acausal universe" (p. 50)? Describing Meillassoux answer he argues that in the absolute contingency of being, which lacks any order, meaning and divinity, and in a search for hope in the face of the 'essential spectres', one cannot negate the possibility that such an order, meaning and divinity would emerged one day in the future (Oral 2017, p. 51). Just as life has emerged from matter; just as thinking has emerged from life, so the absolute contingency of reality enables the possibility that order, meaning and divinity would emerged in the future from this chaotic meaningless, matter, life and thinking. Only the human subjects *because* of our fragility and mortality; *because* we are integrated parts of this senselessness contingency of being, and because of our consciousness of our existential status and craving for universal justice in reality that lacks it, only subjects like this, and *not* any other more perfect being such as God or angels, can be the ground from which meaning, order and justice may emerged (p. 52).

We see that the rationale for moral education that Oral bases on Meillassoux, includes two components. The first is the analogical argument regarding the "optimistic" possibility that cannot be negated. I.e. that a reason, an order and a meaning may emerge from the actual reasonless contingent universe, just as life had emerged from matter and as thinking had emerged from life. The second component is concerned with the place of humanity in this possible process of emergence of meaning. Oral argument concludes that it is humanity with its fragile characteristic, and not any other divine complete entity, that would be the source for such possible emergence. This condition is crucial for him because of Meillassoux's ontological assumption that the world is meaningless and therefore, if meaning and order would at all emerged, it would necessarily occurred on a background which is empty of any order, and by forces (humanity) that are themselves part of the incompleteness and fragility of the universe. Any element of a perfect divinity that may be the source for the emergence of order and meaning, would contradict this fundamental ontological assumption of Meillassoux and Oral, and therefore cannot be included in the narrative they suggest as rationale for moral education.

This rationale for moral education is, I believe, not good enough for basically two reasons. Firstly because from a logical and ontological point of view, if we assume that the world is a contingent reasonless chaos, then the chance that this chaos would yield order and reason is analog not to the actual existence of life and thinking as Meillassoux and Oral believe, but to the chance that a monkey typing randomly on a typewriter would type the bible. I.e. for it to happen one time (tending to one time), there is a need of an amount of time that tends to infinite (Banerji, Mansour and Severnini, 2014). And therefore, this possibility which tends to zero, is not logically and ontologically enough as a foundation for a rationale to moral education.

Secondly, it is not enough from mental and spiritual point of view. Thinking of the general public (children, their working parents sick people, elderly people or any healthy person who is aware of her or his existential condition, an awareness that causes one to suffer), and the amount of hope that is needed in order to enable the human being who wishes to survive the next hour, day or week, to do what is good and just, one finds Oral rationale for moral education (we cannot negate the possibility that one day reason will emerged in our reasonless world) as not enough.

What are the demands from? We are looking here for a narrative that (1) will have an explanatory power regarding the meaning and worth of moral action and moral lives, (2) will have a motivational power, will be an inspiring narrative for morality, and (3) that it would be rational, i.e. that believing in it would not contradict what is reasonably and logically possible, even though it is cannot be proved.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Although Kant's elaboration of the problem have a strong explanatory power, I rather go in a deferent direction that includes story telling characteristic, which, I assume, is more powerful in terms of inspiration. I therefore will suggest a rationale for moral education and describe the way in which reason can be find in our world and existence, by a reading of Plato's allegory of the cave, and other parts of the *Republic*. In the first and second book of the *Republic* Plato sharply raise the question regarding the personal benefit of acting morally and justly, and the whole rest of the book is, in a way, an attempt to answer this huge question.

Therefore, in order to suggest an alternative existential narrative that would give meaning to moral action, moral life and moral education, I go back to Plato's *Republic* and will suggest a connection between three elements: (1) the idea of a balanced soul as described in book IV, (2) an interpretation of the allegory of the cave from book VII, and (3) what we usually conceive to be a just and good action and life, for example, returning a lost wallet. Before describing my suggestion in detail, I will briefly review three different readings of the *Republic* regarding the question of the justification and rationale for good and moral action, i.e. the existential rationale of morality.

1. **The Republic and the question regarding idea of good and the moral and just life**

Although it is the main issue of the *Republic* Plato does not give a clear description of the good and just lives. 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 four of the 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, or in our terms, how such an action has any personal meaning (regardless the social one) in our world. 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 meaning and benefits of a 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, to contemplate them, and how this activity connects to do the right and good deeds.

1. **The theistic reading and the problem of the personification of the good**

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 Plotinian-theistic perspective to face with our problem of drawing from Plato a rationale for morality. He too finds that there is a gap in Plato's *Republic* (and generally in Plato's texts), between, on the one hand, the Form of the Good which is formal and impersonal, and on the other hand the moral obligation of the human agent to do the good moral action. He solves it by suggesting a personification of the Form of Good to God and God's will (Rist, 2012, 269). Without a personal God that has will, Rist claims, there can be no obligation to moral action, i.e. no sense for performing a 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 meaning and rationale for the individual in doing the good action, there must be a personification of the Good as God's will.

Rist of course aware that the personification of the good creates problems and he points as example to the issue regarding the ability of God to "know" the particulars (Rist, 2012, 267). Nevertheless he does not mention the problematic moral and meta-ethical implications that the personalizing solution creates. And in our case, in which I try to find a practical rationale for these days moral education, this problems cannot be ignored. One of the problems with this reading is that it materializes the transcendent sublime, and this materialization is in tension both with accepted reading and interpretations of Plato's *Republic*, and with the demands from a rationale for moral education.

Regarding the textual interpretation problem, it is well-accepted and central themes to find in Plato texts the idea that there is a human inclination to ascribe a hyperbolic value of realness to earthly-material things which possess very little amount of the property of realness (for example see Rep. 6.510a, and Vlastos, 1973). In many places, Plato shows our mistaken inclination to give such an exaggerated value – value of realness – to things which do not possess a large amount of realness.[[3]](#footnote-4) And in totally different ontological sphere is the good, which is pure reality, or as Gadamer names the Platonic Good: the "arché, the starting point (principle) of everything" (1986, 90).

But beyond the interpretational tension, the main problem with personification of the good is that it might serves, as Rist actually points out, as an instrument for performing a specific moral deed. This means that it may actually causes, even if not intentionally, for specific moral deeds to become superior in hierarchy to God. In other words, it 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 what God wills. Again, once the good becomes the personal God – a God that wills – the good loses its transcendent sublime holiness in favor of the material earthly level of existence. It is a mixture, an illusion of blending together the value of pure reality with earthlier thing such as a concrete specific will – a will that in principle directs itself to a whatsoever concrete specific object. In other words it is idolatry. This idolatry leads to an endless inner divisions which bring tensions, conflicts, and cruel wars – absolutely not holy.[[4]](#footnote-5)

Therefore, even though Rist suggests that agreeing with personalizing the Good is the *only* alternative for those who wish moral obligation of the agent (Rist, 2012, 268), I, on the contrary, while do not wish to omit the moral obligation of the agent, would like to omit the personalizing the good.

In order to do so I will suggest a metaphysical existential narrative based on a reading of Plato's *allegory of the cave*, which connects between the metaphysical Form of the Good, and moral actions; this reading gives, I believe, much more encouraging context for morality and moral education then the narrative suggested by Oral (2017). 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 (in Irwin terms: common-justice) and (2) what is considered by Plato as a benefit and a meaning to the individual, i.e. the balanced soul (in Irwin terms: Plato-justice).

The well-known fragments in the *Republic* 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 indirectly say something not of the good but about the *descendants* of the Good – Truth and Knowledge. For that purpose he uses the *analogy of the sun*. After Socrates tries to explain the enigmatic *analogy of the sun* (his first answer regarding the nature of the Good) by using 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, and the *process* of transferring from the uneducated lives to the good educated ones.

These three allegories, that supposed to clarify something regarding the content of the good, regarding its essence, do not really do it directly. Therefore clarifying what may be the nature of the good demands us to delve into an interpretation of the allegories and mainly – the allegory of the cave.

1. **The allegory of the cave**

Since it is obvious to assume that life in the cave represents an unworthy life for humans, and that exiting the cave and living outside it (or at least being in a life-long attempt to exit from it), represents the good life, then an answer regarding the differences between the *life-experience* of those two general alternative ways of life (inside/outside the cave) may provide us a clue regarding what is the life experience that is connected with the idea of Good. The idea of the Good is the lastly and hardly "object" to be seen by the person outside the cave (Rep. 7.517c), and it is seen as "the cause for all things of all that is right and beautiful, giving birth in the visible world light, and the author of light and itself in the intelligible world being the authentic source of truth and reason, and that anyone who is to act wisely in privet or public must have caught sight of this" (Rep. 7.517c). A metaphysical existential narrative that is based on an understanding of that *original*  Good as the source of the whole of reality and all the goodness and just within it, can be much more encouraging context to act, live and educate morally, despite the feeling that the world is morally chaotic.

In imagining the "prisoners’" life-experience 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.[[5]](#footnote-6) This being the case, the life-experience 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*. The experience in the cave is that "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 short, it is the subjective feeling of controlling reality. The cave is close, the prisoners are secured from rain, wind, burning sun or freezing snow. When it is cold it is possible to use their technology and increase the flames of the fire, and when hot to lower them. In other words, since one of the main characteristics of the "prisoners" life experience 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. This feeling is of course an illusionary one, it resemble the life experience of a reach tourist, of sitting on a couch in front of the television – one is experiencing full control as being outside reality.

On the other hand, the individual that is pulled out of the cave (or experiencing the difficulties of being in the on-going attempts of exiting it), 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" (the allegedly reality), 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 partiality temporal nature (see above Meillassoux and Oral); and, as is well described many traditional texts[[6]](#footnote-7), this 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 oneself as a temporal ignorant guest, totally *subject* to the unknown real. It is no surprise therefore 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.

This new self-perspective of the individual's place *within* reality, this awareness, causes suffering and so one may inclined and prefer to forget, repress, and resist keeping it in mind. Nevertheless as a lover of truth and as lover of coherence one cannot accept denying reality and truth. And, one also cannot accept the idea that the real, as a whole, is bad and causes suffering. Therefore, if the truth about one's reality causes her or him anxiety and depression, there must be something wrong in the way one conceives one’s self and reality.

Hence, the educational process should be aimed at adapting the soul so that it would cohere with the fragileness, partiality, temporal uncertain nature of reality and our status in it, i.e. the constant unchangeable form of existence as a whole.[[7]](#footnote-8) This educational process is metaphorically described in the allegory of the cave, but due to the metaphorical language, it is not clear what makes up this process. What is the force that changes the soul so that it finds joy and comfort finding itself within Reality rather than fear; what enables it, being aware of the Real and its place within it, to act in courage but without illusions? In the next section I will show that Plato implies that doing the just and good thing is *the mean*, the ladder, by which this attitude is changing.

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

In book IV, Plato presents the good and just *action* 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 [balance] 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. The first idea is 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 that an inner balance leads to good, just, moral actions. At least they nourish one another. It means, that *the inner life* *is the aim in itself*, and *within it* lies the desirable results, and not in the outer social and political realm as we usually think. For example, returning the lost wallet would repair of the frustrated feelings of the person who had lost it. The second idea is that wisdom from this perspective is seeing (wrapped in the overall constant metaphysical context of our lives), what 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 of the prisoners inside the cave vs. the life experience 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 life experience of being within reality – of being outside the cave, or in the journey outside it. An immoral deed, on the contrary, would help to develop, deepen, and preserve the life experience of the prisoners – the illusion of being beyond "reality". One example of an act like this is an act of humiliating others, probably in order for one to feel better with him or herself, or because one wishes not to pay, to work, or to do her or his part in an agreement or in the world in general. Another act of illusion is of avoidance, as if zero exposure and zero conflicts will help one to overcome any risk and danger. 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 cognition, but in the whole of her existence, her his being. 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. Moral life means the constant aspiration to empower our awareness of the true, good, just and beautiful potentialities of reality, while always keeping in mind that although this aspiration will probably never be realized once and for all, individuals and communities should nevertheless do the best they can to keep on pursuing these potentialities, and, as much as is possible, actualize them. I will come back to this theme later.

Therefore the meaning and benefit of for example returning a lost £250,000 to a very rich firm (who would not really feel the difference), or to overcome fears and stand and fight for what is good and right, has a moral educational impact that is not only on the social or interpersonal level, nor as Kraut (1999) has suggested only on the political sphere of the philosopher. The impact is also on the internal level. By for example returning the money, or by overcoming fears and stand up and fight for what is right, one "reminds" one’s self of her or his place within reality; one remembers the life experience of being pulled out of the cave. On the other hand, keeping the lost money, or avoiding an important fight, would break down their inner unity, their inner balance, i.e. it would return them to the cave's illusion of being beyond reality. In that sense a moral action is like a repeating investigation of the real and our place within it.

To sum up, a good moral action, derive from the love of truth, and by doing it one remembers one's status within reality, a memory that is being expressed in creating, developing and maintaining a balanced, unified harmonized soul.

But why remembering the endlessness of reality necessitate doing good moral deed (such as keeping a fair fight, or in general waiving what may seem to be an unfair advantages) and not living and acting by the well-known approach of "let us eat and drink for tomorrow we shall die" (Isaiah 22:13)? In other words, why not choose a life which directs towards the exploitation of one’s surroundings to maximize, whenever possible, one's relative advantage? Why not use every opportunity for pleasure even though it comes at the expense of others, after all – as many use to say before choosing to fall into the illusion of an extreme pleasure: "you only live once?" And why at all be bothered with the quest for the truth regarding our reality and see it as good? In what follows I will answer these questions.

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

I assume that the answer to the above question is that living in accordance with an "eat and drink for tomorrow we shall die" approach expresses a deep frustration with one's reality, with one's metaphysical constant essential elements; this approach expresses a resentfulness of it. It is like being embroiled in a struggle with reality (not with the unjust changeable components within it, but with the unchangeable aspect of it as a whole). 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 2015 *Mad Max: Fury Road*) 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 even love (or at least it expresses the will, the motivation to be in a state of acceptance or love) of that metaphysical-existential status. This inner acceptance and love is created*,* developed 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.[[8]](#footnote-9)

Moreover, by ignoring the persecuted refugee or by keeping the £250,000 (as part of living in accordance with the eat-drink approach), I am not just expressing frustration, resentfulness, and fear from my place in the overall reality, I am also creating, developing and maintainingwithin 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 (or at least expresses my good will to change my attitude in that direction).

1. **The practical type**

But can we think of an individual who does not live in accordance to the (extreme) eat-drink approach, and yet finds it perfectly reasonable not to 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 other materialistic rewards, let alone put themselves in danger to help persecuted refugee. Just for the sake of illustration, most of us can think of ourselves (in our one dimensional social "bourgeoisie" 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 – in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. I will name this person 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. On the opposite, this type would be very alert to what others may think of him or her. She or he may be very effective, intelligent, helpful to her or his friends and harmful to their enemies, a good negotiator – they can gain high honors and success. What, then, is the problem 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 to the extreme in accordance with the eat-drink approach?

My answer to this question is connected to the character of reason and reality. Regarding reason, in *After Virtue*, MacIntrye 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, from 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. MacIntyre describe this character as the Manager. "The manager treats ends as given, as outside his scope;[[9]](#footnote-10) his concern is with technique, with effectiveness in transforming raw materials into final products, unskilled labor into skilled labor, investment into profits" (MacIntyre 2007, 30. See also Mangham 1995).

But giving hyperbolic unrealistic value to changeable ends, to changeable aspects of reality, and see them as an unchangeable given, does not really turn them to be so. And therefore that person would be inclined to deny, to repress all the *truly* unchangeable aspects of reality, the existential, metaphysical elements of life. Hence she or he would be paralyzed in the face of the "essential spectres", i.e. again, the true constant unchangeable aspects of reality: as death, illness, ignorance, laws of logic or other constant elements of humanity, not necessarily with negative connotations.

Another aspect of the limitation of the life experience of the practical type regards our use of our reason. Our reason is a force that aspires for explanations, to understand *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, rationality. 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 and the real* (see Kant's idea of reason as a unifying function in Williams 2016).[[10]](#footnote-11)

In terms of the allegory of the cave, after experiencing the life outside the cave and the state of consciousness one has arrived at when seeing the sun – the source of creation and reality, this truth-searching individual, this lover of wisdom,

"if he recalled to mind his first habitation and what passed for wisdom there [in the cave], and his fellow-bondsmen, […] he would count himself happy in the change and pity them […]. And if there had been honors and commendations among them which they bestowed on one another and prizes for the man who is quickest to make out the shadows as they pass and best able to remember their customary precedence, sequences and co-existence, and so most successful in guessing at what was to come, […then] he would [not] be very keen about such rewards, and […] he would [not] envy and emulate those who were honored by these prisoners and lorded it among them, [rather] he would […] 'greatly prefer while living on earth to be serf of another, a landless man'[[11]](#footnote-12), and endure anything rather than opine with them and live that life […]" (Plato, Rep. 7.516c-e).

Hence we see that for those who prefer to search and withstand the (real) unchangeable aspects of reality and not live in illusion, then moral lives, moral actions are the only way to achieve happiness and create within them the unconditional joy of life, self-contained joy. This is so because on the one hand there is no need for falling into inner contradictions that demands to disconnect ourselves from our reason from our intellectual need for coherence and truth, and on the other hand there is a process of balancing the psyche so that it more and more comes to accept and approve the unchangeable aspects of reality and yet not fall into anxiety and despair, but rather of joying and loving reality as whole as it reveals.

Therefore, it is not just the "eat-drink" 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) as unchangeable, as a form of reality, they still create within their souls a split in which the true 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 (especially the unchangeable ones), and thus to reality as a whole.[[12]](#footnote-13)

1. **The creation thought experiment, or why Reality as a whole "deserves" our acceptance**

But why is it so good for one to love their reality and to accept it? Why what is real or true also good, and does it thus deserve our acceptance and love? Should not we devote our energies to change reality? It should again be clarified that, by accepting reality, I do not mean accepting every event, case, or phenomenon *within* reality – the *changeable* *contingent* *events* *within* it. If there are, for example, cases of cruelty, hunger or other potentialities to correct and develop the wellbeing, of humanity, we *ought* to rectify what possible and not to accept the *actuality* of a lesser possibility. But these contingent events do not represent reality, existence, as a whole, i.e. the Form of reality, its logic, or the unchangeable aspects of it. Yet the issue I raised here is regarding accepting *these* aspects: the unchangeable rather than the changeable contingent one. Again, we may demonstrate it by thinking of what for now at least we consider as unchangeable characteristics of reality: the law of noncontradiction, our being an historical and physical creatures that are subject to space and time, our need for oxygen, protein and so.

Returning now to our question: why what the unchangeable aspects of reality, reality as a whole, deserves 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 person who is sexually abused, accept reality as a whole?

As I noted earlier regarding the nature of the Good in itself in Plato, I believe that this is *the* question that Plato is silent about – the ineffable. There cannot be a literal answer to the question why should we love existence as a whole, why is it good. Either one *sees* that it is good, or one does not see it. And of course, one can *only see this by oneself* by its own. Nevertheless I will try now to give a sense of what it means to see that. Let us now go back to the opening of the article and describe here again the thought experiment.

So again, 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, in everyday language, 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 humanity and its surroundings. Actually, no one will ever encounter any creatures from this planet or any other creature that may encountered this planet's creatures. 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 forever be only with you.[[13]](#footnote-14) What is your choice?

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 unchangeable characteristics of the reality (again, for now we mostly think of the law of noncontradiction, our being an historical and physical creatures that are subject to space and time, and ,more concretely and terrifying: the inevitable separation from our loved ones, death, the build-in uncertainty, diseases and degeneration of our bodies and so forth), 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).[[14]](#footnote-15) Of course it is possible to be in the way to such an ideal state of mind, to hope for it and work for it. An individual or a culture can say to themselves that they are working on themselves so such an acceptance of the unchangeable aspects of reality would one day be achieved. Of course we need first to be able to identify these aspects, to learn and gain knowledge and understanding, so to be able to distinguish them from the changeable aspects, and so on. All these are the goals of education, of knowledge, research, the value we find in truth and morality. It is built on the belief, the hope, to be an educated person or an educated culture, and then feel acceptance and love to reality as a whole, to existence as a whole.

From a personal point of view is to say that *no matter what* has happened to me, what contingent event had occurred in my personal history, 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).

1. **Conclusion**

What then can we draw from Plato's *Republic* regarding the implications of a moral life in a (prima-facie) meaningless world? What rationale do we have as teachers and parents – as educators – to advise our students and children to waive up a relative advantage that had fallen into their hands, for example to return lost money, even though they need it badly? In other words, what rationale educator can hold when practicing moral education in what may seems to be a world lack of reason, in which one seems to be a fool not to fulfil one's advantage over others?

After showing the limitations of Oral's (2017) answer to the above question, I have suggested an alternative rationalistic answer founded on a reading of Plato's Republic. In one of the first formulation of the problem, Plato asks in the *Republic* what is justice and good, and what is the meaning and reason of performing good and just acts, or living a good and just lives, actions and lives that require at least some degree of relinquishing one's relative advantage over others. In other words, what makes it reasonable and meaningful (not in term of fear of punishment or the interest of winning an award), to overcome the natural urge and the common logic to maximize comparative advantage and exploit it as much as possible? After reviewing some of the readings others have arrived at regarding this question in the *Republic*, all of them share the enigmatic character of Plato's own answer to the question, I have suggested my reading that combines two elements in the text. The first is the idea that a just and good action and life are the one that creates, maintain and develop the inner balance of one's soul. And wisdom will be the ability to see, among all the possible acts and lives, the possibility that would do so. The second idea (bases on the first one), is that Plato's allegory of the cave implies what is the substantial content of good and just actions. And so, as I have argued, it is those lives and those decisions and actions that remind and empower the individual awareness and mindfulness of the unchangeable aspects of reality, and in addition would bring the individual to an acceptance, balancing its psyche towards a positive affinity to reality as a whole, and even of loving it. Such an affinity is developed even though the unchangeable aspects of reality bear unpleasant and difficult to accept, let alone love, implication regarding human's life – natural, logical or social laws that we cannot control and that in many cases causes us frustrations, anger, rage, heavy pain, sadness, depression or anxiety.

So, the general main answer I have come to is that the implications of a moral life, of actually doing the right and good thing (i.e. waiving on unjust relative advantage that had fallen by chance to our hands) in a (prima-facie) meaningless world is the creation, development and maintaining of a united harmonious balanced soul that possesses a positive affinity towards reality and existence as a whole. 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 to reality, when govern the individual or community way of life and decisions, direct it to look for compensational illusions. This negative affinity is being represented as the life experience of the prisoners inside the cave. In this life experience the prisoner fantasizes herself or himself beyond reality. This mean a poor understanding of reality which mean giving an unrealistic value of unchangeable-aspect-of-reality, to changeable and contingent events in it. Such an illusion, although may be very comfortable and give a sense of control and security for the short run, deprives and suppresses one's own reason and its craving for the truth the real.

Specifically what for example would a hard-working single parent benefits from returning good money that he or she had found? If at the moment of returning the money he or she would direct their attention and intention to the inner connection between existence as a whole, their place within it, and the Good, they would transform the returning event from a case of a gullible person who does not understand his or her surroundings, into a metaphysical ceremony that binds the Good with the constant unchangeable aspects of Reality.

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1. I use interchangeably the terms: reality, being, existence. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. For more on the idea of reasonable faith see Kant's Critique of Practical Reason. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. See for example *Symposium* 210e-211b where he describes the "final object" which is "… neither comes to be nor perishes, neither waxes nor wanes", and keeps on to "describe" it in negative form, closing this description of the absolute indescribable One with the obscure line "existing ever in singularity of form independent by itself" (Plato, Sym. 210e-211b). Or the special character of the philosophers vs. the "doxophilists" (lovers of opinion) (Plato Rep. 6.480a). While the "[…] philosophers are those who are capable of apprehending that which is eternal and unchanging, […] those who are incapable of this but lose themselves and wander amid the multiplicities of multifarious things, are not philosophers" (Plato Rep 66.484b). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. As Plato describes: "[…] would not that pain his eyes, and would he not turn away and flee to those things which he is able to discern and regard them as in very deed more clear and exact than the objects pointed out?" (Plato Rep. 7.515e). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. See for example Ecclesiastes, Plato's Phaedo, Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky, Heidegger, Camus, or Sartre. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. 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. In Meillassoux's terms it is the senselessness of being, the absolute of contingency and the essential spectres. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Of course that the last deed is an of waiving one's advantages, feeling that their comfortable life in face of a persecuted refugee is an unfair advantage. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. "Outside his scope" means in my terms unchangeable aspects of reality. I.e. the manger, the practical type, gives hyperbolic value to changeable aspects of reality like norms, public opinion and materialistic objects, all of which are in continuously ongoing change even though we do not (immediately) sense it. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Another examples of more recent philosophical discussions on Reason, see Deutsch 2011, or Cavell 1982. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Homer, The Odyssey, 11.489. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. One may reasonably ask if the above idea is not just an opposite basic assumption to that of Meillassoux and Oral. While they assume a contingent unreasonable order in the world, I suggest a Platonic rational order. I do not believe that it is so simple. Because I agree with their first intuition regarding what they call the essential spectres of reality. I.e. the starting point regarding the human existential experience is the same. Yet my suggestion shows that knowledge of what is changeable vs. what is unchangeable, plus moral actions an life, can developed a soul, a psyche, that sees these unchangeable aspects, which conditioned reality as a whole – as good. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. This demand is being put forth in order to refrain as much as possible from social or group pressure or a disposition to please others or provoke them. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. For an opposite understanding (a terrible one I believe) of the issue of the worth of existence see the concept of anti-natalism, and for example Benatar (2012; 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)