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Socrates on Egoism.
Does he say we should be virtuous and egoists?*

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Resumen En este artículo examino el problema de si la concepción socrática de la *eudaimonia* entraña el egoísmo. Esto es, si, según Sócrates, un hombre que actúa teniendo como criterio final su felicidad es un egoísta. Este punto de vista parece entrar en contradicción con lo que pensamos comúnmente acerca de lo que debe decir una teoría moral. Clasifico los intentos que se han hecho por resolver el problema en dos grupos: los formalistas y los sustantivistas, con base en sus objetivos generales. Argumento que la segunda clase de enfoque es más efectiva, puesto que trata de interpretar la teoría de Sócrates como un todo y la hace más coherente. Asume que Sócrates ofrece una teoría de la motivación humana para actuar en la que el agente busca su felicidad, pero otorgando también una función central a la amistad, el amor y la justicia.

Palabras clave
eudaimonía, virtudes, egoísmo, Sócrates, Klosko, Nakhnikian, Rudebusch, Irwin.

Socrates on Egoism. Does he say we should be virtuous and egoists?

Abstract In this paper I address the issue whether Socratic *eudaimonia* entails egoism. It is, whether according to Socrates' view a man who acts having his happiness as final criteria for his acts is an egoist. This view seems to be in contradiction with what we commonly think a moral theory must say. I gather previous attempts to answer this question in two big groups: formalists and substantivists, based on their general objectives. I argue that the second kind of approach is more effective because it tries to see and interpret Socratic theory as a whole and make it more coherent. It takes Socrates as providing a theory of human motivation to act in which the agent seeks his happiness, but in which friendship, love, and justice play a fundamental role.

Key words
eudaimonia, virtues, egoism, Socrates, Klosko, Nakhnikian, Rudebusch, Irwin.

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According to Socrates' *eudaimonism*, the good is one's own happiness. It means my happiness is the final criterion for my actions. This seems to entail egoism, in the sense the answer to the question 'why should I be moral?' appears to be answered by Socrates as saying 'because it makes me happy'.

But there are also common sense views about what ethics, morality, and being a virtuous agent mean that seem to be contradictory with the idea that the Socratic moral view entails egoism. So we could ask: 'In the Socratic theory, can a virtuous agent be an egoist?' In this paper I will attempt to answer this question, the question of whether Socratic ethical theory entails egoism.

In order to do that, I will present and examine some previous attempts to do this. I will divide these attempts into two general groups. I will call the first group *formalist*, because it focuses mainly on the form of the Socratic arguments and their coherence in particular dialogues; and I will call the second group *substantive* because it seeks to evaluate Socrates' position in a broader picture, in his theory as a whole; in this sense they seem to be seeing Socrates as holding a more substantial position about human motivation. My position is that although the focus of the first group is very important in the sense that it allows us to see the strength of Socrates' arguments in particular places, a more charitable interpretation and one that addresses the problem I will be outlining needs to explain the Socratic theory as a whole to assess its coherence[1].

I. The problem:

In the *Gorgias*, during Socrates' dispute with Polus about the usefulness of oratory, Socrates asks:

> Do you think that when people do something, they want the thing they're doing at the time, or the things for the sake of which they do what they're doing? Do you think that people who take medicines prescribed by their doctors, for instance, want what they're doing, the act of taking the medicine, with all its discomfort, or do they want to

[1] Obviously, it means we need to know his theory as a whole very well, and I don't pretend to have such knowledge of the Socratic theory. On this evaluation of Socratic theory, I will follow George Rudebusch (2003) and Terrence Irwin (1977).

be healthy, the thing for the sake of which they're taking it? (*Gorgias*: 467c, Zeyl trans).

Polus answers it is obvious they want the thing for the sake of which they are doing the thing. Socrates assumes that because there cannot be an infinite regress, there must be something for the sake of which we do all the things, and this is the good. Later he asks Callicles: "Do you also think as we do that the end of all action is what's good, and that we should do all other things for its sake, but no it for their sake?" (*Gorgias*: 499e).

Although Socrates didn't clearly establish here that the final good is happiness (as he does in *Symposium* 205a[2]), he says those who act unjustly cannot be happy. He says this in response to Polus' statement that Archelaus –who rules Macedonia– has committed a lot of crimes and is, nevertheless, happy. Socrates claims it is impossible, because "injustice, and corruption of soul as a whole, is the most shameful thing (*Gorgias*: 477d)." He concludes "The happiest man, then, is the one who doesn't have any badness in his soul (*Gorgias*: 478d)."

According to this, we have:

1. There are intermediate things (actions) that we pursue for the sake of other things (actions).
2. At the end of an ethical explanatory chain, there is the good. This is the final reason why we do what we do.
3. The good is happiness, understood as the well-being (*eudaimonia*) of the soul (506e).
4. The well-being that counts as a final reason to act is that of the agent´s soul.

From this, we get the *Eudaimonist Axiom*, according to which "happiness is desired by all human beings as their ultimate end of all their rational acts (Vlastos, 1991: 203)." And it seems to follow from that axiom that the questions "Why should I be moral?" or "Why should I be just?" must be answered, in the Socratic account, by appealing to my own happiness. The reason why I must act in such a way is because it promotes my happiness. My last reason to act is an egoistic one and my regarding for others seems to be just

[2] "That´s what makes happy people happy, isn´t it –possessing good things. There´s no need to ask further, 'What´s the point of wanting happiness?' The answer you gave seems to be final."

instrumental to my happiness. Is this Socrates' position? Does he think an agent can be virtuous and, at the same time, egoist?

There are a lot of attempts to answer this puzzle. As I said earlier, I classify some of those answers as following two different strategies. The first one I will consider is mainly focused on the soundness and validity of specific arguments on some Socratic dialogues. I call this strategy *formalist*. George Klosko and Gorge Nakhnikian's accounts are examples of this type. I call *substantive* the second strategy used, because it seems to me it attempts to go beyond the first one, and give a broader interpretation of Socrates' view. George Redebuch and Terence Irving's approaches use this second strategy.

The order in which I present the views show what I think is a sort of conceptual development or improvement on the interpretations[3]. In this sense, it is worth noting that those in the first group claim that Socrates holds egoism because he needs it as a dialectical move or a sort of rhetorical tool to support another position. I think this interpretation fails to capture the complete Socratic picture[4], because it doesn´t seem to be faithful to his general method or fit his general views. My thesis is that Socrates cannot be recommending us to be egoists. It cannot be the case that he is claiming that we can be at the same time both virtuous and egoists. Following Irwin, I want to say Socrates holds *eudaimonism*, which is a self-interested theory, but it doesn´t entail egoism.

II. Interpretations

A. Formalists

Those who are in this group answer the question whether Socrates theory entails egoism by showing how this position is required for him to hold some other position, analyzing specific arguments, and evaluating the force of the egoism's thesis on those arguments.

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[3] It means I am not following a chronological order in the presentation of the views. In fact, Irwin´s account is prior to the first type of answers that I call *formalist*. In despite of the time that is between all those considerations, I think Irwin´s view is still the most satisfactory to the question I am trying to answer.

[4] Obviously, I am aware that there is evidence to support this interpretation. George Klosko and George Nakhnikian, the authors I am considering here show that very well. Moreover, they not only give good and abundant evidence to support their position, they also make formalization of Socrates arguments and analyze them in detail. I just think they fail to see the Socratic theory as a coherent corpus.

In this section, I will show two examples of this strategy. The first one, by George Klosko, claims Socrates affirms egoism in order to deny *akrasia*, and succeeds in his propose. The second example is George Nakhnikian's approach that says Socrates denies *akrasia* by affirming psychological egoism, but he fails in supporting his position.

George Klosko and On the Analysis of the Protagoras

Klosko says that in order to deny *akrasia* in the *Protagoras*, Socrates uses egoism as a "crucial dialectical move":

> Socrates' interpretation of *akrasia* in the Protagoras is dependent on a certain view of human motivation, which we may call Egoism… Socrates is able to reduce the many's account of *akrasia* to absurdity by showing it conflicts with the obvious truth of egoism (Klosko, 1980: 307).

In the Platonic dialogue, Socrates and Protagoras are inquiring whether there is one virtue with many names or if there are different virtues. The problem of *akrasia* arises when Socrates asks Protagoras what he thinks is the role of knowledge on people's behavior, i.e. if he thinks knowledge can rule a person or not. Protagoras answers "wisdom and knowledge are anything but the most powerful forces in human activity." (352d, Lombardo and Bell trans). Then, Socrates says:

> (…) most people aren't going to be convinced by us. They maintain that most people are unwilling to do what is best, even though they know what it is and are able to do it. And when I have asked them the reason for this, they say that those who act that way do so because they are overcome by pleasure or pain or are being ruled by one of those things I referred to just now (352d-e, Lomb & Bell trans).

To show that the many are wrong, Klosko says, Socrates needs to reduce to absurdity what they maintain. And he does so by constructing an argument whose premise and conclusion presupposes egoism. He claims Socrates' strategy is powerful and successful because it is pointing out what everybody holds without being aware of that, and without knowing the implications of such a belief. Fo-

llowing Klosko's formulation (Klosko, 1980: 312), let's describe a situation of *akrasia* in these terms:

1. A man does evil
2. Knowing it is evil
3. He is not compelled to do it

And the many's explanation for his conduct is:

4. Because he is overcome by pleasure

Socrates says 4 is absurd because it conflicts with the obvious statement that human beings "pursue pleasure as being good and avoid pain as bad." (354c, Lomb. & Bell trans). Klosko claims this has two important corollaries for Socrates' view: "The ignorance theorem: if any agent chooses between goods *p* and *q*, with *p* greater than *q*, so as to get/to do *q* instead of *p*, he does so out of ignorance (he makes a mistake in estimating the relative values of *p* and *q*)". (Klosko, 1980: 310).

The second corollary is the affirmation of *Hedonistic-Egoism* or psychological hedonism, which allows Socrates to exchange "pleasures" for "goods". Klosko says now we can see that Socrates' strategy is clear:

> Egoism is a thesis about intentions, while the many's view of *akrasia* has moral agents behaving in apparent contradiction to egoism. But the contradiction is only apparent, since, in describing *akrasia*, the many describe only the agent's observed behavior, without making any reference to his intentions (Klosko, 1980: 315).

Although Klosko recognizes some equivocations and ambiguities in Socrates's holding of egoism[5], he thinks the strategy succeed because it proves *akrasia* is absurd. The egoism´s thesis succeeded as a tool to show akrasia doesn´t stand.

George Klosko and The First Socratic Paradox

Nakhnikian says the three Socratic paradoxes are all related to psychological egoism and to the dictum that virtue is knowledge

[5] For example, in Socrates' interpretation of "overcome" because it misconstrues the nature of the choice; Klosko says: "(…) in arguing that an art of measurement alone would conquer akrasia, Socrates neglects the role of various psychic forces –desire, passion, emotion- in certain kind of choices. In addition to the art of weighing pleasures, our heavy friend would require the fortitude to use it" (Klosko, 1980: 322).

and vice is ignorance. The first Socratic paradox is "no man desires evil, all men desire the good." (Nakhnikian, 1973: 1)[6]. Nakhnikian evaluates the arguments offered in *Meno* and *Gorgias* to defend this paradox, but for constraints of time I will focus my attention only on *Meno*.

At 77b, *Meno* says "virtue is to desire beautiful things and have the power to acquire them (Grube trans)." But then, Socrates asks him if it implies there are people who desire bad things, and *Meno* replies this seems to be the case. Socrates then counters by asking whether people really want those bad things or they don't know those things are bad things. Because nobody wants to be miserable and unhappy, they both agree, "those who have no knowledge of these things and believe them to be good clearly desire good things (77e, Grube trans)."

Nakhnikian claims Meno asserts here two hypotheses: one that says there are men who desire evils believing them to be goods; and the second that says there are also men who desire evils knowing them to be evils. Meno divides the second hypothesis into two parts that establish a difference between *believing* that evils are good for those who possess them, and *knowing* that evil harms those who possess it. Socrates believes the first part is conceptually impossible (if they know something is bad they cannot believe bad things are good for them) and the second is psychologically impossible.

This implies Socrates is making a crucial assumption here, that there is a conceptual relation between the concept of evil (or good) and the notion of being harmful (or beneficial):

> (…) a relation like the one that exists between being red and being colored or between being a cat and being a mammal. One does not know what it is for something to be red if one does not know that nothing can be red and not colored. In like a manner, as Socrates understand things, one does not know what it is for something to be evil if one does not know that nothing can be evil and not harm those who possess it. In other words, we are not thinking of evil if we are not thinking of that which harms its possessor (Nakhnikian, 1973: 4).

[6] The second is "no man who (knows or) believes that an action is evil does it willingly" and the third is that "it is better to suffer injustice at the hands of others than to do unjust acts oneself (Nakhnikian, 1980:1)."

After some explanations and formulations of Socrates' arguments to defend this paradox, Naknikian assesses the general strategy as a failure. He claims that premise 1). "If a man knows something is evil, then he knows that the thing will harm those who possess it" is false under one natural interpretation, and under another it is tautological. When it is tautological, the burden is on premise 2). "If a man knows that it will harm him to possess something, then he does not want to possess it" (the psychological assumption). But this premise is false.

He claims 1). is false if 'evil' is understood in one of the ways in which it is commonly used. We can imagine, for example, an incorrigible criminal who is punished. According to Socrates, the criminal is punished justly, which is good. But, Nakhnikian says, "by hypothesis punishing an incorrigible man will do him no good at all. His punishment serves only as a deterrent to others. Here, then, is something good that does not benefit its possessor (Nakhnikian, 1980: 9)." And 1). is a tautology if 'evil' is understood in the special sense that Socrates gives its Greeks counterpart, *kakos*, namely, as at least implying harm to its possessor.

As a result the burden is on 2)., but it is also false. Some people know and others believe that smoking cigarettes daily over long periods of time is harmful to them. Nonetheless, most of them intensely crave an amount of cigarettes that they know or believe is potentially deleterious to their health. Nakhnikian ends this part concluding that the support given in *Meno* for the first paradox is unsound, and because of that "the first paradox remains unproved" and therefore "is false (Nakhnikian, 1980: 12)."

We have seen two attempts to see if Socrates´s theory entails egoism. Both claim it entails egoism because Socrates needs to hold it in order to deny akrasia. Klosko thinks the dialectical move succeeded while Nakhnikian thinks don't. As I have said before, both fail on seen Socrates' moral theory in a broader picture.

B. Substantivists

I call *substantivis* this second set of attempts to answer the question whether Socrates' theory entails egoism because it seems to me the interpreters are trying to understand Socrates' conception about human motivation by taking into account his theory as a whole.

They do so not only assessing particular arguments in specific dialogues but also regarding if it is coherent to say one could be virtuous and egoist. In this sense, I think this second strategy more adequately addresses the question that motivates this paper.

With this distinction in mind I will now consider George Rudebusch and Terrence Irwin's interpretations. According to Rudebusch's view, Socrates would be egoist if he were a eudaemonist, but he is not a eudaemonist. He proposes to consider Socrates as holding an agent-neutral perfectionism theory. Unlike Rudebusch, Irwin claims Socrates is a eudaemonist but eudaemonism doesn't entail an ethically objectionable egoism[7].

Rudebusch and *Socratic Perfectionism*

Rudebusch starts by recognizing that there are at least three important passages where Socrates appears to be holding egoism. They are *Euthydemus* (278c5-d5), *Meno* (78a), and *Protagoras* (356b). But there are also some passages that seem to show Socrates holding the opposite view: *Apology* (28b) and *Crito* (45c), where he appeals to considerations of duty, justice, and righteousness.

He says there have been two general strategies to reconciling the texts: interpreting Socrates as egoist and as eudaemonist. But both positions are self-regarding about value in the sense they think only the self's happiness is intrinsically valuable. Because of that, they face similar objections.

Assessing the strategy of considering Socrates as an egoist, Rudebusch says it is possible to interpret the *Apology* and *Crito* passages as subordinating virtue, duty, justice, and regard for others to my own happiness. But he finds at least three good reasons to think it is not right. First of all "This instrumentalist interpretation is unfaithful to its own start: *Crito* 48b says living well and living justly are the same thing. But if *a* and *b* are the very same thing, it is not possible for *a* to be a means to *b*" (Rudebusch, 2003: 131).

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[7] I am aware Klosko's theory is subsequent to Irwin´s theory. In fact, there are 26 years between them. And I really think Klosko suggestion is cogent, original, and puts Socratic theory in the best position between moral theories (because integrates virtues, moral obligation and impartiality). But I think his interpretation is too much charitative, and it is not well supported by the evidence. In fact, in certain sense I attach my view to the traditional view about Socratic theory, which sees it mainly interested on the concept of virtue rather than on the concept of duty as the central notion to evaluate human actions.

Second, he says, charity also raises some problems for this interpretation. The main of them is that "ethical egoism is morally crude. It would have us value virtue and the concerns of others for the wrong reason, with an impure heart (Rudebusch, 2003: 131).[8]"

Third, the interpretation that virtue merely has an instrumental value for Socrates would make implausible the Socratic idea that "wisdom is necessary (*Ethd* 281d) and virtue sufficient for happiness (*Ap* 30c-d, 41c-d; *Cri* 48b; *Chrm* 173d, 174b; *Grg* 470e; *R* I 353e-4a) (Rudebusch, 2003: 132)."

On the other hand, there is the strategy that sees Socrates as a eudaemonist. Rudebusch considers that although this strategy doesn't have the previous problems, it has its own. It is expressed in a dilemma:

> The eudaemonist holds that virtuous living constitutes my happiness. But why do I make virtue a constituent of my happiness? Is it because (first horn) I happen to find that my virtuous living is my happy living or does it make me happy because (second horn) it is intrinsically worthwhile? (Rudebusch, 2003: 133).

Either horn we choose will conduce to the same: eudaemonism is another self-regarding theory of the good, and should be avoided for the same reasons we use to avoid the egoist view. There are also other-regarding theories of the good: selfless altruism and self-including altruism. Both claim that the good is the good of others. But they seem to be ruled out for similar reasons as the previous ones, because they are agent-relative accounts[9]. All those theories are perfectionists, in the sense all of them define "the good and the good human soul in terms of human nature and the good human

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[8] He says: "Socrates conceived of happiness as invulnerable, claiming that nothing can harm a good human being in life or death (Ap 41d). His advice in the Apology (28b) and Crito (48c-d) that there is 'only one thing to consider' –namely virtue- is a locus classicus, together with the scripture passages of the doctrine of single-mined devotion to virtue." (Redebusch, 2003: 131).

[9] To be honest, I think Rudebusch doesn't give good reasons to do so. Or at least those reasons are not clear enough to me. He just claims: "I have included the other-regarding altruisms alongside of self-regarding egoism and eudaimonism for two reasons. First, it casts eudaimonism –quite properly, in my opinion- in a negative light. For 'self-including altruism' will, I take it, strike everyone as a peculiar, indeed dishonest concept: an altruism in which the only good maybe the self´s! By analogy, other-including eudaimonism, in which the only good may be that of others, should seem just as unacceptable as an ethical theory. The second reason is that, by exhausting the possibilities of agent-relative accounts, the diagram makes it apparent why agent-relativism as a hole is unacceptable." (Redebusch, 2003: 135). He gives a diagram and expects we see there the reason why is it unacceptable, but I just cannot see them.

life... But perfectionism need not make the good agent-relative in this way (Rudebusch, 2003: 136)."

Although he recognizes there is no consensus in contemporary ethical theory about which theory could be superior (agent-relative or agent-neutral), he thinks the study of Socratic ethics can illuminate this discussion.

I think his interpretation is both cogent and original. To support it he goes to *The Republic* 341-2, where Socrates gives his account of expertise. There, Thrasymachus says: "No craftsman, expert, or ruler makes an error at the moment when he is ruling… A ruler, insofar as he is a ruler, never makes errors and unerringly decrees what is best for himself (341a, Grube trans)."

Then Socrates answers analyzing the examples of a doctor and a ship's captain, and makes Thrasymachus realize that their expertise has something advantageous to bodies and sailors. This is, "no other craft seeks its own advantage –for it has no further needs- but the advantage of that of which it is the craft (342c, Grube trans)."

As a result, Socrates claims, "no one in any position of rule, insofar as he is a ruler, seeks or orders what is advantageous to himself, but what is advantageous to his subject, that on which he practices his craft (342e, Grube trans)."

Rudebusch claims that expertise, in this sense, must be agent-neutral in his motivation. It is so because what matters to him/her is to maximize the craft's good, without considering whose good will it be. It would be just the health in general, the virtue, and so on.

Obviously, there are some possible objections to this interpretation (he considers two but mentions at least seven[10]). Nevertheless, he thinks his account is better than the rivals, because if we take a rival theory to be true "we would have to attribute, uncharitable, an inferior theoretical account to Socrates, whether as egoist, which is morally repugnant and incompatible with his claims that wisdom is necessary and virtue sufficient for happiness, or as eudaemonist, which escapes moral repugnance only by ceasing to be self-regarding in all but name (Rudebusch, 2003: 140)."

As I said before, Rudebusch's view is both cogent and original. Moreover, it seems to be a good attempt to solve the puzzle of

[10] Antonio Chu, Charles Kahn, Rachana Kamtekar, Donald Morrison, Terry Penner, Naomy Reshotko, and Dan Russell.

Socrates making statements about human motivation that sounds egoists while framing an ethical theory that describes the virtuous agent as one with high moral standards. Nevertheless, it is not clear enough why should we prefer a neutral-agent theory instead an agent-relative one. After all, an agent-regarding account need not be morally reprehensible.

Terence Irwin and *Plato's Moral Theory*

Irwin holds an interpretation according to which Socrates is a eudaemonist. But, unlike Rudebusch, he claims eudaemonism doesn't entail an ethically objectionable egoism.[11] He says:

> These questions about ethical egoism are not about Plato's concerns. He is not trying to describe morality, as we tend to understand it, or to defend egoism from what we call the moral point of view. He wants to know what in general it is rational for someone to do; and this question remains to be asked when we understand what the moral point of view is and what it requires –if we identify morality by its concern for other people's, or everyone's, interest. Plato is not offering an absurd way to understand morality, but asking the apparently sensible question whether it is worthwhile to do what morality is normally supposed to require (Irwin, 1977: 251).

By distinguishing between two types of egoism, Irwin shows it is possible to avoid the charge against eudaimonism that says it entails not genuine other-regarding virtues. There is moral solipsism, which considers all virtues as instrumentally valuable for the agent's good, apart from any benefit or harm to other people; and moral egocentrism, which says "virtue must contribute to some end valued by the agent as part of his own good (Irwin, 1977: 255)." So if Socrates and Plato are egocentrists, Irwin says, their views are not touched by the same objections to egoism and could be seen as not conflicting with morality at all.

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[11] It is worth to take into account that Irwin considers there is a development on Platonic dialogues, and because of that he makes a distinction between Socrates and Plato's views. Because there are a lot of discussion about the classification of Platonic dialogues and the correspondence of the view to Socrates or Plato, I will just continue my work without paying too much attention to this particular issue. We can keep thinking on Socrates as the character of the Platonic dialogues and evaluate his position as we have been doing it.

We can find evidence in Platonic dialogues to hold both Plato and Socrates are and they are not solipsists. *Protagoras*, some passages from the *Republic*, and Plato's contemplative ideal seem to support the solipsist view. *Pheado*, *Pheadrus*, *Republic* II, *Grogias*, and the just man's 'propagative' desire at the *Symposium* appear to hold the opposite non-solipsist position. But Irwin asks us to think which is the "Plato's normal view of psychic harmony in the *Republic*" (Irwin, 1977: 257).

As many others have suggested, the main contradiction with the egoist view arises when we consider friendship, love, and justice on Platonic account, because they imply regard for others. Irwin claims that to understand how his conception of justice doesn't imply solipsism we should think on the state of the soul Plato says is that of the just man:

> He does not think of just actions as instrumental means to some separate state of the soul which might persist without further just action. If someone has the inner peace and extensible psychic harmony of the p-just man, but does not care about just action, Plato will simply deny that he is p-just or is really controlled by the rational part; if p-justice were simply inner harmony, it could not be denied to the deviant men. Plato expects the really just man to have the kind of psychic order which chooses just actions or, in the Symposium's terms, wants to propagate virtue (Irwin, 1977: 257).

Regarding friendship and love, we should refer to Plato's account of ascent and propagation, according to which the lover will want to propagate virtue and justice on his/her friend or beloved. So it could be seen egocentric, because it is justified by the virtuous man's own final good; but this final good is not solipsistic. There is an important difference, Irwin points out here, between self-love and the love of the non-rational part of the soul. The prior doesn't conflict with the pursuit of virtue and altruistic morality.

In despite of the good defense Irwin has made of moral Socratic theory, in the sense it could be seen as altruistic, it is interesting to notice some problems regarding the relation with others in this view. Consider, for instance, that Socratic altruism depends on his theory of love ('Platonic love'), one of whose more important features is the search of the improvement of the beloved. In this sense, there is no reciprocity in his view. In Irwin´s words:

> Plato is open to objection for his view of the beloved´s role in the process; the metaphor of the lover as sculptor and the beloved as statue revels the serious fault (Phdr. 252d5-253b1), as though the beloved were simply the passive material which the lover moulds to his own design… the selection of this paradigm for Platonic lovers' ethical account is significant itself, and Plato offers no ethical account of love between equals (Irwin, 1977: 269).

As a result, we are justified in going back and ask again: 'Is he considering persons and their interests by their sake, or just as a sort of instrument?' Irwin´s answer goes as follows. We contrast the 'concern for someone for his own sake' with purely exploitative concern, with his use as an instrument to achieve my ideals. When Plato talks of the improvement of the beloved, he is thinking on that that would make him/her better in Socratic terms, i.e., by participation of the good. He says: "And so if *A* tries to make *B* more just, then, on Plato´s view, he is not exploiting *B* for some ideal irrelevant to *B*'s interests; but he is promoting *B´s* overriding interest" (Irwin, 1977: 271). This means the Platonic lover have non-exploitative concern for the beloved´s interests. Obviously, Irwin grants there is still possible to say that Platonic love fails to meet a Kantian requirement on the love of persons, which is the respect for the beloved´s own interest as such, even if it means to harm him/herself.[12]

There is still another interesting objection to Platonic theory that Irwin considers, related with altruism and his view of justice. If we think that justice has to do with interest and people´s rights, a similar problem arises than that regarding interests. Plato´s moral theory accords rights to no one. Irwin claims: "Plato assumes that justice will always benefit the recipient; but he recognizes no duties of justice which protect a man´s rights even against his own interests" (Irwin, 1977: 274).

At this point, we could ask why Plato holds eudaimonism or, in other words, which are the advantages of the eudaemonist's view, given the problems that seems to entail. According to Irwin, it gives

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[12] Irwin provides some elements of his theory of Platonic love and says it is deeply indebted to Vlastos (648), but he has doesn´t think all his criticisms are justified. In particular, and related with our topic, he doesn´t agree with Vlastos in saying that "Plato undervalues liberty because he values people only for their usefulness" (Irwin, 1977: 343-345, note 28).

a convincingly answer to the question about how we should live, the role of virtues in achieving a good life, and moral obligation:

> The appeal to a final good is Plato's procedure for asking a question a rational man is right to ask, and for answering it; when the procedure is rightly understood, it is clearer that he does not seek to show that morality promotes a solipsist end, but that it is worthwhile in itself for someone who correctly decides the kind of life he has best reason to choose [… eudaemonist approach to morality] might seem the only reasonable answer to a question which every reflective moral agent needs to decide. (Irwin, 1997: 267).

We have seen four attempts to explain a puzzle that rises when we consider some Platonic passages were Socrates says we should do the best to achieve virtue while in others seems to reduce the criteria to choose between actions to the consideration of the final agent´s good. The last criterion is the agent´s happiness. If we understand this later affirmation as Socrates holding egoism, the explanation of friendship, love, and justice as regard for others doesn´t seem to fit in his theory as a whole. I have argued that *formalists* approaches that try to show Socrates holds egoism as a dialectical tool to support another thesis fail in the sense that seem to rule out a coherent explanation of those notions inside the Socratic theory.

Because of that, I considered approaches I called *substantives*, in order to make sense of what seemed contradictory on Socratic theory of human motivation to act. I founded Irwin approach the most satisfactory, due his deeply and broad understanding of Socratic and Platonic theory that shows it is possible for Socrates to be eudaemonist and self-regarded without being egoist. His interpretation is strongly supported by the evidence, rigorous, and can make sense of different concepts of great importance within Socratic theory, as that of friendship, love, and justice.

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