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PLATO AND THE STRUCTURES OF INJUSTICE¹

By

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Drawing on Plato's dialogues *Republic I* and *Gorgias*, I would like to argue in this essay that injustice is a self-contradictory and self-cancelling concept. I would like further to illustrate the structures of injustice with reference to Thucydides' Melian dialogue and literary works by Aristophanes, Molière, and Brecht.

The figure of self-cancellation is, as Hegel notes in his history of philosophy, the specific insight of Socrates:

What Socrates wished to effect was that when other people brought forward their principles, he, from each definite proposition, should deduce as its consequence the direct opposite of what the proposition stated, that is, he did not advance a counterposition, but rather worked with each proposition and showed how it contained its own opposite (18.458, my translation).

Socrates' use of immanent critique, his ironic assumption of an opposing position, followed by an act of thinking the position through in order to show its internal contradictions, is important in two wide-ranging senses. First, it is the method of philosophical critique. If the validity of immanent critique is not acknowledged, one is left with one dry assurance against another and no rational means for settling disputes. For a refutation to be thorough and definitive, it must be taken and developed from the principle in question, not effected by external claims or arbitrary counterassurances. Second, immanent critique not only demonstrates untenability, it establishes by way