

Do the Ends Justify the Means? Justice in Albert Camus's "The Just Assassins"

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Abstract:

The correlation between Ends and Means has remained controversial from time immemorial. To date, whether ends justify means and vice versa has never become a settled issue. This makes the topic we are investigating today very important in the field particularly of Justice and generally of the Social Sciences and Humanities. Should some people continue to think that the achievement of their endeavor matters no matter the methods adopted, or must the latter be genuine at all costs? Is it inappropriate to reject personal suicide and accept murdering somebody? Again, to what extent could one consider an action as a necessary evil? Our investigation thus aims to test the assumptions by seeking to determine what is supposed to receive focus in every human endeavor with regard to ends and means. In light of this, our focus is on Justice from the viewpoint of a decision to kill a dictatorial king with children so as to manifest freedom and happiness. At the end of it all, that the success of the day should not be judged by the evening harvest other than the grains sown becomes the key message and a summary of major findings. This contributes to the field (especially vis-à-vis ethics) in as much as it reinforces focus on the means – which reflects existing table of values, law and equity – in every human effort.

Keywords: Happiness, Ends, Means, Justice

1. Introduction

"The end" is the goal whose accomplishment deserves the implementation of instruments and strategies in the form of "means." Justice is the moral principle that requires respect for law and equity. It is the existence of a generally suitable system where one is expected to adopt appropriate means to act and to treat one's neighbor so that Equality, Liberty, and Fraternity, which lead to human happiness, are manifested. Justice is also defined in a distributive sense. According to Plato in his Republic, to manifest justice is "to give to each what is due to them." Karl Marx, for his part, considers that this equitable portion for each individual should be at least "enough to meet their needs." Justice can also be punitive in the form of punishment that the one who committed the crime deserves. The retribution should therefore be proportional to the crime. Hence the biblical sentence of Moses: "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." It is normal for humans to justify their actions, to demonstrate the accuracy, truth, rationalism, morality, or righteousness of their actions. That is, the quality of well-regulated actions, exact and thus well adapted to their functions. This brings us to the notion of duty: what a person should do (a moral obligation), the right action in the perspective of realizing the noble universal ends of existence. At this stage, let us ask ourselves this question: Can one consider that the so-called "just" ends justify the means? That is, in the absence of any value system, do the goodness or righteousness of the ends deserve any means to achieve them? In other words, "Do the ends justify the good or bad consequences of an action respectively help to

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decide whether the action that chains them is just or unjust? Should one care about the means as long as the end is desired? Or should one measure actions so as to purge or mitigate the damage despite the urgency and necessity of the ends? These are the kinds of questions that the present study aims to answer. This study will therefore eliminate the logic of the question of ends and means vis-à-vis justice in Albert Camus's "The Just Assassins." In light of this play, our first part, The Ends, will answer the key questions: What ends, who wants them and why are they wanted?; the second, The Means, will lead to a study of the balanced conflict, their foundation and their reason for being; the third part, Do the Ends Justify the Means?, will tend to examine the bias and its justification in light of the text in order to lead to a synthesis in the form of a Conclusion which will be followed in turn by a Bibliography that will encourage further exploration.

2. The Ends

The following summary answers the questions: What ends? Who wants them and why are they wanted?

To overthrow tyranny so that Russian citizens can attain happiness, the combat organization of the Social Revolutionary Party (represented by "the just," a group of Russian terrorists formed by militants) is tasked with killing Grand Duke Serge by throwing a bomb at his carriage. But when the militant charged with launching the first bomb notices the Grand Duke's nephew and niece – two children – in the carriage, he suspends his action, because "killing children is contrary to honor." Later, he will throw the bombs and the Grand Duke will be killed. Arrested, he accepts without faltering a death that restores his innocence.

Apart from these three paths, the summary reveals the notion of an ultimate end: access to happiness. In the play itself, one realizes that the militants are also seeking the following penultimate ends: an ideal state of liberation, tolerance, justice, fraternity, as well as fullness. In short, everything that brings happiness to each individual or to the greatest majority of individuals in Russian societies. Thus, Stépan would like action to be taken quickly to "hasten the liberation of the Russian people" (p. 17). He firmly believes that the group will "build a Russia freed from despotism, a land of freedom that will eventually cover the entire world" (p. 63). Annenkov, for his part, will never cease to ensure "that the land is returned to the people." Dora has these words to convey to us: "When everything is over, he (Stépan) will be happy" (p. 35). She hopes that she herself will have, after everything, "a strange happiness in the heart" (p. 42). She always thinks about "the time when Russian children will no longer die of hunger" (p. 62).

These ends thus unite all the revolutionaries (Dora, Kaliayev, Stépan, Annenkov, Voinov, Skouratov, Foka, and even the Guard). The attention of all these revolutionaries will therefore focus on these ends. Which means that they are all united in their resolution to eventually realize happiness. For Kaliayev, it is unheard of to "speak of terrorist action without taking part in it" (p. 37). Annenkov recalls the complicity of all: "(Do you remember who we are? Brothers, merged with one another, turned... for the liberation of the country" (ibid.)

We realize, therefore, that liberation, tolerance, fraternity, as well as fullness themselves constitute means that are so closely attached to the ultimate end, happiness; they serve as efficient causes for it. Which excludes studying them as specific means.

3. The Means

The first means, in the guise of an end immediately preceding the ultimate and related penultimate ends, is to overthrow tyranny by killing Grand Duke Serge to create an ideal state, a regime based on justice.

It is truly by overthrowing tyranny that said ends can be achieved. This neutralization of dictatorship promptly follows another, in the form of a disguised end: killing Grand Duke Serge. Kaliayev summarizes this aspiration for us: "You will kill him with us" (p. 34). He specifies that they are "turned toward the execution of tyrants, for the liberation of the country." Dora will therefore tell us: "We must kill despotism" (p. 42). We will therefore understand that "Yanek agrees to kill the Grand Duke" (p. 62). Stépan himself affirms: "...we will kill the Grand Duke and we will overthrow tyranny" (p. 16). Kaliayev exclaims: "What! I would have the tyrant before me and I would hesitate?" (p. 20). He insists: "It is not him that I kill. I kill despotism" (p. 42). He resolves: "I have agreed to kill to overthrow despotism" (p. 63) and he is very happy about it: "All of Russia will know that Grand Duke Serge was executed by bomb by the combat group" (p. 17).

This last means, the killing of the Grand Duke, proves to be very controversial. It is controversial because it constitutes the central theme of the play: Must one eliminate any object that bars the attainment of the ultimate end? That is, does it require the overthrow of the Grand Duke, including his nephew, his niece, and even the Grand Duchess if possible? Or would it rather be just to safeguard the lives of all these people other than that of the Grand Duke who symbolizes tyranny? Is it finally justifiable to achieve the ends by any means or is the righteousness of these ends supposed to be inscribed in the perspective of the morality of the means employed? This problematic leads us to the question of which is supreme, the end or the means. Here is a problematic that calls for a balanced study of what invokes each of the two phenomena in the play.

3.1 Preeminence of the End

Stépan, responsible for "maintaining liaison with the Central Committee" (p. 18), is undoubtedly convinced that the revolution justifies everything: debauchery, murder, destruction. Stépan is therefore entirely different in all his attitudes apart from sharing with the others the same conviction regarding the necessity of realizing the ultimate end and recognizing the Organization as a reference. Dora observes this fact very early on: "Stépan is different" (p. 35). Consequently, according to Stépan, the means are worth nothing, are justified only by the end. No limit for him is therefore imposed on the means that the group should employ to achieve its ends: "Nothing is forbidden that can serve our cause" (p. 61). His conviction is total: "There are no limits... And if this death stops you, it is because you are not sure of your right. You do not believe in the revolution" (p. 63). The word "rights" here presupposes the righteousness of the means. He is no longer afraid of anything. Even if necessary, he could enter the police and play both sides, as Evyo proposed. He is very conscious of the atrocity of the means he proposes; only, the reality experienced by him seems to have blunted all possible effects. This reality rather imposes on him justifications for his attitude, justifications that provide him with an abstract ideal of absolute justice that he places above everything. Thus, what is called excess appears to him as requirement, necessity, and justice. The claims of punitive justice, the removal of despotism, the necessity of returning power to the people, the difficulty or even impossibility of having to start all over again as well as the directives of the Organization as a reference serve as his justification. The requirement of punitive justice constitutes for him a natural demand for vengeance against tyranny. For him, after all, doesn't violence beget violence? Stépan can hardly detach his imagination from the chain of atrocities, himself a victim, committed by the dictatorship: whips, suicides, killings, arrests, imprisonments, etc. The wounds of the past seem to him to be able to be expiated only through a bloody revolution. He therefore proposes that justice be allowed to naturally claim its retribution.

Vengeance, for him, is necessary against a regime that has sown so much panic. It is the only means of expiation or redemption: "the bomb alone is revolutionary" (p. 18). That is therefore the reason why he is too concerned with "how many (bombs) would it take to blow up Moscow" (p. 20). He therefore insists: "I

want to throw the bomb" (p. 28). He can never approach life in a way that spares the lives of children. He believes that "a true revolutionary cannot love himself" (p. 32). Hatred possesses him, he himself concedes: "Yes, I am brutal. But for me hatred is not a game. We are not here to admire ourselves. We are here to succeed" (p. 32).

According to Voinov, the truth that Peter the Great had built St. Petersburg with blood and the whip robbed him of his education so much that the uselessness of truth now seems lucid to him and makes him resolve: "I lie. But I will no longer lie the day I throw the bomb" (p. 23). Stépan, who spent three years in prison, indicates his misfortune to us: "I was ashamed of myself, only once, and through the fault of others when I was whipped. Because I was whipped. The whip, do you know what it is? Véra was near me and she committed suicide in protest. I lived. What would I be ashamed of now?" (p. 69). Annenkov the leader himself utters the threat to indicate that not everything is allowed: "Hundreds of our brothers have died so that we know that not everything is allowed" (p. 61). Schweitzer died by accident. All this indicates the violence sown by the regime.

According to Stépan, another justification for his remarks is the necessity of obedience to the directives of the Organization. The Organization, in fact, constitutes for him the reference, the table of values to which all the actions of the revolutionaries should correspond. He thinks that Kaliayev "had to obey" (p. 57). He religiously adheres to the referential norms: "I could if the Organization commanded it" (p. 59). He firmly believes in the success of the revolution as soon as the directives of the Organization will be implemented: "I don't have enough heart for these trifles. When we decide to forget the children, that day,... the revolution will triumph" (p. 59). For him therefore the end is primary and the means are accessory.

Further, Stépan believes that the primacy of the end over the means is just and that several other factors prove it: the chance comes only once, many attacks have failed, tension becomes inescapable and the risks and discomfort unbearable, the difficulty or even impossibility of success becomes elusive, the sacrifices as well as the embarrassment of having to reorganize everything prove suicidal. He summarizes it all: "Two months of surveillance, terrible dangers faced and avoided, two months lost forever. Egor arrested for nothing. Rikov hanged for nothing. And we would have to start over? More long weeks of watches and ruses, of incessant tension, before finding the right opportunity again? Are you crazy?" (p. 58).

In his wisdom induced by experience, Stépan does not need to be made to understand that the tsarist regime entrenches itself in power so well that the Russian people lack access to the sovereignty that is theirs. Apart from revolution, therefore, this popular sovereignty would be only a myth and the atrocities would be perpetuated. Should he be a victim of it forever? His determination is therefore well fortified! Then enters into play the fundamental notion of excess, which he calls justice, excluding any other consideration.

It is therefore not surprising that he, always clinging to his notion of justice, is full of confidence in his own means: "Yes, if necessary, and until he understands. I too love the people" (p. 60) and then "What does it matter to me if we love them strongly enough to impose it on all humanity and save it from itself and its slavery" (ibid.). Even Kaliayev exhibits his fear: "Stépan would be right then. And he would have to spit in the face of beauty" (p. 37). Sarcastically, Stépan makes his point of view of Kaliayev's failure understood: "That was too many people, I suppose, for our poet" (p. 54). And then, he seeks to evoke sympathy for his own conception of justice: "because Yanek did not kill these two, thousands of Russian children will still die of hunger for years to come... So choose charity and heal only the evil of each day, not the revolution that wants to heal all ills, present and future" (p. 62).

3.2 Primacy of the Means

Do the means take precedence over the end? This is a problematic whose development simultaneously unveils the fundamental notion of measure of the revolt, which in turn reveals the reverse side of the coin of the notion of justice. The following questions constitute the starting points: Should the lives of the two innocent children in the Grand Duke's carriage be taken? How far should one sink into evil to make good triumph and abolish despotism?

Kaliyev and Dora immediately reveal to us the solid arguments that require that the means be considered as more important than the end. First of all, to enhance the primacy of the end is to employ evil methods or strategies that risk leading to nihilism. Voinov swears atrociously: "I lie. But I will no longer lie the day I throw the bomb" (p. 24). Stépan's destiny, for example, is guided by impatience and vengeance, but he insists that the end is worth more than the means. This excess of desire is often the cause of catastrophe and failure. Stépan abandons himself to excesses. Kaliyev thinks that this excess resulting from the superiority of the means constitutes only an abyss of madness leading mechanically to destruction. One realizes that Stépan's revolt is more vehement than that of Kaliyev. It is led against injustice but also against humanity, against society, and against man. The justice sought therefore becomes injustice against innocence. The consequence is Promethean revolt. Stépan then remarks: "We will be the masters of the world" (p. 59) and Kaliyev notes: "But behind what you say, I see a despotism announcing itself which, if it ever installs itself, will make me an assassin whereas I am trying to be a justicier" (p. 63). Otherwise why insist on killing the two children in the carriage when the retribution of justice is directed only against the wrongdoer or criminal? According to retributive justice, only the person who committed the crime must undergo punishment and no other.

Another argument of Kaliyev and his colleagues is that one must try to preserve life which is very dear. Each individual naturally needs human tenderness. Every human being needs it sometimes especially since human life is very sacred and important to protect. The first moral duty will therefore be to recognize the sacred character of human life and the first categorical imperative will be to respect this life. Respect for this life is better illustrated thus: "I cannot indeed affirm the value of life without recognizing the universal character of this value. I cannot simultaneously reject suicide and accept the murder of others. Through my revolt, I therefore enter into communion with other men."

The human soul is by nature sacred and powerful. That is why Kaliyev is, apart from his guiding principle of measure, constrained despite himself not to throw the bomb when he sees the children in the carriage: "Then, I don't know what happened. My arm became weak. My legs were trembling. A second later, it was too late... Dora, did I dream, it seemed to me that the bells were ringing at that moment?" (p. 55). Dora is astonished: "Could you, Stépan, with your eyes open, shoot a child at point-blank range?" (p. 58). According to her, Schweitzer could not either the first time. Besides, even Stépan, who undoubtedly presents an inhuman rigidity, closes his eyes when asked if he could have thrown the bomb in similar circumstances.

Another argument of Kaliyev and his colleagues to maintain the preeminence of the means is the jurisprudential requirement to place limits on any freedom or human action. Again, naturally, any action that goes against the expectations of the vast majority of the people is doomed to failure. Dora therefore says that if the children were killed "the Organization would lose its powers and its influence" (p. 59). She adds: "And if all humanity rejects the revolution? And if the entire people, for whom you fight, refuses to have its children killed? Will it be necessary to strike also?" This is undoubtedly the reason why she advises that "even in destruction, there is an order, there are limits" (p. 62). She is firmly convinced that: "That day, the revolution will be hated by all humanity" (p. 59). The so-called happiness will be rejoiced by whom after the massacre of people? Would not the misfortune of individuals be intensified? One cannot therefore

multiply disorder in the name of the revolution. Consequently, the innocents who apparently live in peace should be spared. It seems impossible to achieve justice by the path of injustice and unhappiness.

Moreover, the group, apart from Stépan, moderate the means to be employed by also inscribing their actions in the perspective of the directives of the Organization: "Everything had to be foreseen and no one could hesitate about what had to be done" (p. 57).

Another point emphasized by the group against the preponderance of the end vis-à-vis the means relates to this same equitable retribution which requires that killing is taking someone's life and therefore one must be killed after having killed for saving redemption. This belief has an expiatory quality. Kaliayev believes that men do not live by justice and innocence alone and therefore to love justice is to sacrifice oneself for the men of tomorrow. He therefore affirms that he loves those living today on the same earth as him and that it is them whom he salutes.

It is therefore for them that he fights and that he consents to die. He will therefore not strike the face of his brothers. He believes that doing so would be equivalent to adding to living injustice for a dead justice.

4. Do the Ends Justify the Means?

After the exposition of the balanced conflict of ends and means exhibited above, let us try to take sides. Before this, nevertheless, let us review synthetically the key arguments of each of the two parts of the conflict.

Stépan, for his part, puts forward the following: the requirement of punitive justice, the necessity of vengeance, the uselessness of truth, the obligation to obey the directives of the Organization as a reference, the long duration of surveillance as well as the fullness of confidence in abstract justice. On the other hand, Kaliayev and his colleagues reveal to us the preeminence of measuring the means by referring us to the harmful effects of the fullness of confidence in abstract and absolute justice, to the need to preserve sacred life, to the natural power of humanity, to the jurisprudential requirement to place limits on any freedom or human action, to the need to listen to the Organization as well as to the necessity of expiration and redemption after having killed.

One realizes that Stépan's approach, on the surface, is not devoid of reason for being. The monarchy holds absolute power. It does not employ it in a liberal manner in order to render freedom and happiness to the people but in a tyrannical and dictatorial way to make them suffer. To compound the misfortune, the monarchy entrenches itself in power by jealously guarding this power such that whoever tries to overthrow it or criticize it by telling the truth of the tyranny that manifests itself is imprisoned or put to death. Should the order be allowed to perpetuate itself thus? Several attacks are doomed to failure and the chance presents itself only as rarely as possible. Moreover, the duke confronts each attack or criticism with absolute violence. What means should one therefore employ to confront such an attitude? Why not kill the nephew and the niece to prevent the death of thousands of Russian children for years to come.

Implicitly, Stépan's arguments reveal all the apparent weaknesses of Kaliayev and his colleagues' propositions. Nevertheless, a deeper analysis exhibits the contrary. Stépan's words and attitudes reveal only his excessive desire for exaggerated vengeance because of the pains he has suffered. According to even the absolute and punitive justice to which he clings, only the one who has committed a crime must be punished according to the law and the measure of his crime. Why then must the Grand Duke's nephew and niece die for the crime they have not directly committed? How even can children prevent hunger? The necessity exists for one to respect human life which is very sacred and dear. Stépan, for his part, firmly

believes in the authenticity of the ultimate and penultimate ends: kill the Grand Duke and whoever it may be, overthrow tyranny and restore freedom and happiness to the Russian people. Thus, who will enjoy this happiness of the people? This absolute justice that Stépan proposes (requiring the execution of individuals who apparently live in peace) therefore chains only nihilism. Moreover, if justice constitutes the moral principle that requires respect for law and equity; and if Stépan and Kaliayev recognize the Organization as a symbol of this law, what prevents the recognition of the obligation to follow quite closely the directives of the Organization according to which only the Grand Duke is to be brought down? And if no measure is taken and the children and many other individuals die and the Organization is hated and neglected, how can he Stépan even survive to enjoy the happiness he has always dreamed of?

One can therefore see that the measure proposed by Kaliayev and his colleagues (especially concerning the principle of the necessity of expiation and redemption after having killed) is more apt to realize the ends of the Organization by mitigating the damage so that the people can survive in order to amply rejoice in the fruits of the ends.

This truly constitutes the basis of Kaliayev's rejection to accept the Grand Duchess's proposal to exhibit regret. Again, it is the authentic foundation - in the end - of the happy death of Kaliayev and that of Dora.

5. Conclusion

This shift from the logical development of the balanced conflict of ends and means to the unbalanced conflict thanks to the bias taken, amply reveals to us the preeminence of measure over excess, of moderate justice over abstract absolute justice. The execution of the Grand Duke without the children, Kaliayev's trial and his execution as well as Dora's death can at least awaken an awareness of the order of things on the social, economic, etc. level so as to effect some reforms to suit the Russian people, especially since the organization will not be hated by them. Despite this state of affairs, the responsibility for the political order is always left in the hands of the absolute monarchy. Consequently, how can one definitively render what any justice primarily requires, absolute sovereignty, to the Russian people with the perpetual existence of the Serge dynasty?

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